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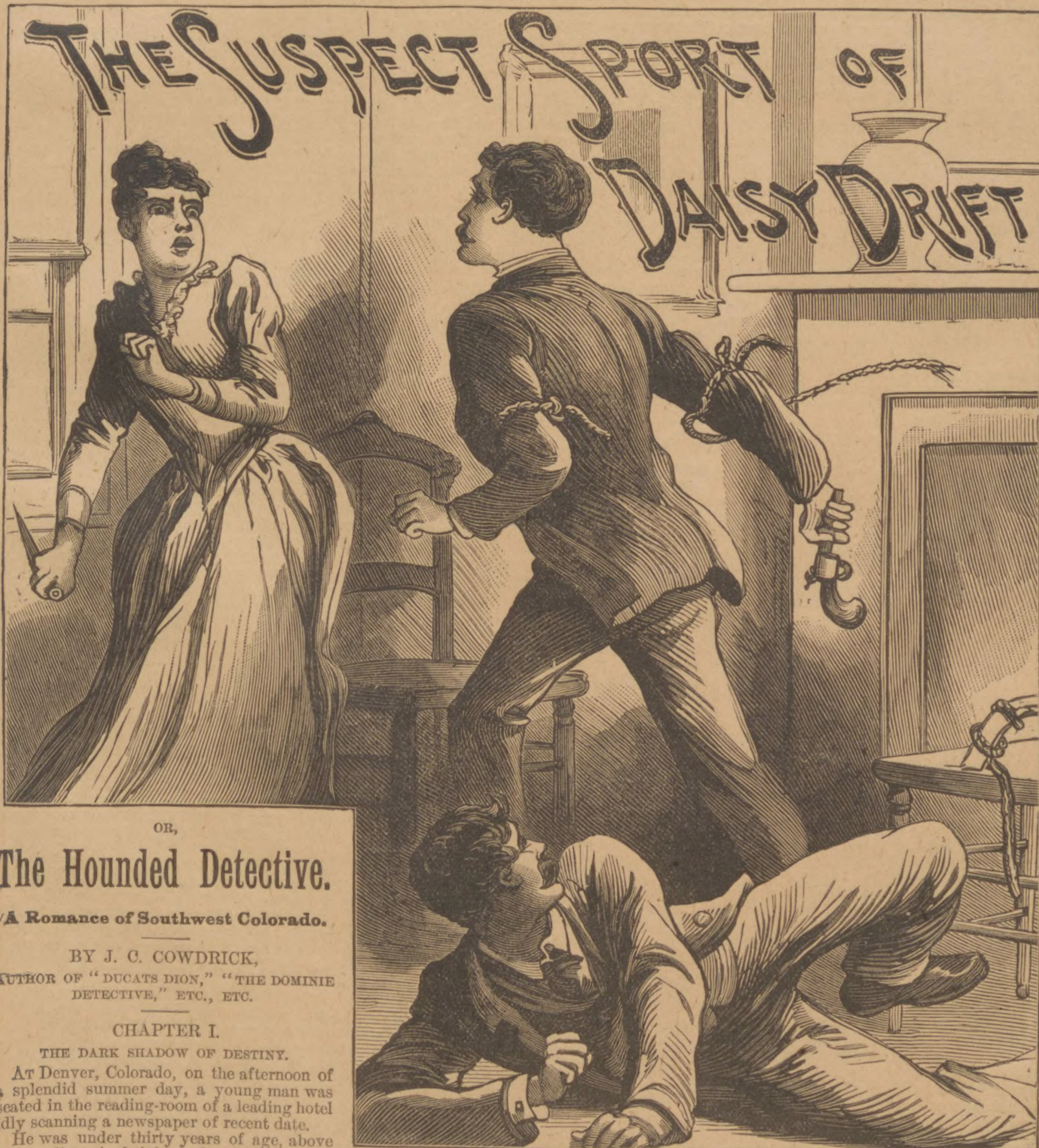
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OR,

The Hounded Detective.

A Romance of Southwest Colorado.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "DUCATS DION," "THE DOMINIE
DETECTIVE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE DARK SHADOW OF DESTINY.

AT Denver, Colorado, on the afternoon of a splendid summer day, a young man was seated in the reading-room of a leading hotel idly scanning a newspaper of recent date.

He was under thirty years of age, above the medium in height and proportions, de-

THE NEXT MOMENT THE NOW TRIUMPHANT DETECTIVE SPRUNG UPON THE WOMAN ASSASSIN.

cidedly good-looking, and altogether a magnificent specimen of physical manhood and the accomplished athlete. He was dark, with black hair and mustache, and had piercing black eyes.

Plainly clad in a well-fitting suit of some dark, serviceable material, a soft felt hat and calf boots, and being without jewelry or ornament of any kind, there was nothing in his dress to attract attention; yet few persons would pass him by without a second glance. There was something about him which seemed to command it. And that "something" was his general appearance, mutely suggestive of ease, grace, elegance—in short, everything bespeaking the gentleman.

And such John Heathcote was. Gentle blood flowed in his veins, and he stood head and shoulders above "the common herd" by right of birth, education and polished manners. He was all his appearance indicated, and more. Brave as a lion, he was a terror to his foes; gentle as a woman, he was adored by his friends. He was familiarly known as "Genteel John."

John Heathcote was a man whom grim Destiny had chosen to play a leading role in the stern drama of life. As a detective without a peer; as an outlaw proscribed and hounded, yet really innocent of wrong; as a merciless scourge against crime and criminals, and yet withal a very king among men; his name was destined soon to find place on every tongue. But he knew nothing yet of what the immediate future had in store for him. The seal had not been broken; the hidden page was yet unread.

Genteel John was superintendent of a mine in the wild country miles north from Denver, at a place called Daisy Drift. It was there that his princely bearing and manly qualities had won for him the appellation "Genteel," the word expressing in brief everything that was complimentary.

The mine of which he had charge was known as the "Job's Find." It had been discovered by one Job Wellertree, and at first had borne that gentleman's name in full; but that being found too unwieldy for everyday use, it had been cut down to its present brevity. The mine was run by a stock company, of which one Colonel Mark Lyndon was chief owner and president.

Colonel Lyndon was a man of fifty-five, a resident of Denver but having a summer cottage at Daisy Drift. His family consisted of his wife and a son and a daughter. The son, Jackson, was a young man of twenty-two; the daughter, Nydia, being three years younger.

John Heathcote had fallen in love with Nydia Lyndon at sight, and on her part the gentle passion had been reciprocal; and, finally, John had asked for her hand in marriage. His request was granted; there had been a quiet wedding at Daisy Drift; and now, after a two weeks' tour, the happy couple were returning home.

They were stopping over for a day or two at Denver, and so, on this afternoon, we find John Heathcote seated in the hotel reading-room as described.

His bride, at the time, was in their room entertaining some of her girlhood chums who had called.

He was scanning the paper idly, as said, when something arrested his eye.

It was a brief paragraph, as follows:

"Hon. Murdock Kinross will arrive at Denver to-night, and will put up at the Hotel as usual."

"Honorable, indeed!" he mused. "A robber of orphans, and in the sight of Heaven a murderer, too. To his cruel treatment my poor mother's death was due. It was a sad day for her and me when she became his wife. Let me meet him; and I'll remind him how honorable he is."

As he meditated thus the young man's face took on a hard, stern expression, and the fire of hatred burned in his keen, flashing eyes.

Casting the paper from him, he rose and began pacing up and down the room with nervous strides.

"Twenty years ago, when I was but a child," he reflected, "my father died. He had confidence in Murdock Kinross and appointed him as guardian over me, intrusting a fortune with him for me when I should become of age. About three years later my mother married the rascal, giving him control over her own fortune, which was

no small one. After I had received numerous cuffs at the hands of the wretch, every one of which hurt my poor mother a good deal more than it hurt me, I was sent away to a school where my mother paid for a number of years' tuition in advance. Only for that I do not know what I might have become."

He walked with bowed head, his thoughts leaving a burning impression upon his brain as they passed.

"While I was at school," he continued musing, "my poor mother died. I afterward learned that her death was hastened by the brutal treatment she had received at her husband's hands. Soon after her death he sent notice to the school where I was, that I was to be turned out as soon as my term expired. It must have galled him to learn that I was entitled to five years more, and that all my expenses had been paid in full for that time. He tried to get the money back, to cheat me out of even that, but he was foiled. I served another year there, when I was passed along to a college to finish my course. I owe the man nothing—nothing save the merited hatred I cherish for him. Honorable? Yes, he is an honorable villain, capable of any evil that will serve him best."

The young man's hands were now clinched, his brow was knitted in a dark frown, and his steps were more quick and nervous than ever.

"And he is coming here to this hotel to-night, is he," he communed with himself. "I will see him and once more demand the fortune he has cheated me out of—the fortune that was left me by my father. When I came of age, and demanded what I had been told was mine to have, I was laughed at. He had made away with every penny of it, and by some crook in the law had placed himself in such a position that I could do nothing. He laughed at me, snapped his fingers in my face, and told me to go to work and earn my bread, as I need not expect anything from him. I could do that—was doing it then, and—"

He had passed out to the piazza now, and at that point in his reverie he was interrupted.

A soft, white hand slipped under his arm, and a sweet face looked up into his own.

It was his bride, who, her callers having gone, had come out upon the piazza to look for him where she had left him an hour before.

"Why, John," she exclaimed, "what has come over you? You look as if you are angry with the whole world. What can have happened to make you frown like that? I am really afraid of you."

Genteel John had stopped in his walk, had taken the two little hands into his own, and as he looked down upon the pure, sweet face of his bride a smile chased the shadows quickly from his brow and he cheerfully responded:

"I am not angry with you, my pet; of that you may be sure. It is nothing you need be troubled about, but I will tell you what caused the frown. I have told you all about myself more than once. I have just noticed in the paper that my adored stepfather is coming here to-night, and memories of the past were in my mind. That is all, little one; and now let us go to our room."

With that he drew her arm through his own and led her into the hall, the forced smile still upon his face, while hers was sweetly pensive as though there was something of fear in her mind.

As they disappeared from sight a man stepped into view from around the other side of the piazza.

He was a tall man, not bad-looking, and was well dressed; but his face was distorted with rage and held an expression of fierce hatred.

"Enjoy her while you may, John Heathcote!" he fairly hissed, as he looked toward the door through which the happy couple had just passed. "Your time is to be short, for I swear you shall not long retain the prize you snatched from me!"

He crossed the piazza, grating his teeth in rage as he passed the door, and going on, disappeared down the street.

This man was one Osmond Millfield.

He had been John Heathcote's rival for the hand of Nydia Lyndon.

To John's success he had laid his own

defeat, and now he burned with desire for revenge.

Unwilling to see that he could never have won the lady anyhow, even with John out of the field, his one thought was to ruin her happiness, since it had been denied him to possess her.

Millfield was a stockholder in the Job's Find, and a man of considerable wealth and not a little influence. He was about thirty-five years of age, and was used to having things pretty much as he desired.

His threat was no idle one. He meant every word he had uttered; and, could Genteel John have been aware of it, there were terrible trials just ahead for him.

Heathcote and his bride passed up to their room, and John closed the door when they entered.

Scarcely sooner had they entered than, greatly to John's surprise, Nydia covered her face with her hands and dropped upon a chair, giving way to a flood of tears.

John sprung to her side instantly, knelt upon the floor before her and endeavored to draw her hands away from her face, while he implored to know the cause of her sudden outburst of grief.

"Nydia! Nydia, dear!" he cried. "What is it? Tell me what has caused you to weep like this!"

His tone was full of agony.

He could not imagine what had come so suddenly to cloud the spirit of his happy bride.

For some time her sobs and tears were his only answer, but presently she threw her arms around his neck, pressed her tear-wet face to his, and cried:

"John! I know something terrible is going to happen! I am afraid you are going to be taken away from me! Something heavy has been upon my heart ever since we reached Denver. What can it be?"

"Nonsense!" John exclaimed lightly, though his face was pale and a sudden chill had seized his heart. "You are tired, perhaps half ill, and your fears are groundless. You must rest, and to-morrow you will be yourself again. There, there, little one, don't cry!"

Immediately had come another outburst of weeping, and in spite of his best efforts John found it impossible to stop the flood. It seemed as though the heart of his bride must break under the terrible strain. And it looked so unreasonable, too, her weeping; so almost foolish that she should cry.

Suddenly came a calm, as suddenly as had been the breaking of the storm, and laying her hands upon John's shoulders and looking steadily into his eyes, Nydia addressed him rapidly and earnestly.

And as her words fell upon his ears John Heathcote felt the blood recede from his face, and, strong man as he was, he trembled.

The first dark shadow of a terrible destiny had fallen upon his life.

CHAPTER II.

THE BLOW ABOUT TO FALL.

NEVER, to John, had Nydia looked more beautiful.

He caught her to his breast, showering kisses upon her pale, tear-wet face.

"You shall not be taken from me!" he cried. "These are only idle, foolish fears, my little pet."

Yet his voice was husky as he uttered the words, tears dimmed his own eyes, and he could not shake off the dread apprehensions.

"I hope not, dear John, I hope not," was the sad, sorrowful response, "but I imagine I can feel the icy hand of Death already at my heart. I feel that I am—"

"No! no! no!" John interrupted. "You are too fair and young to die! Such ideas must be banished from your mind, Nydia, my love. You are in the very bloom of life and health, and—"

"But I cannot get rid of the impression, John. It has taken hold upon me, and it becomes stronger and heavier each hour. A heavy sword is hanging by a single thread over our short-lived happiness, and I know it is soon to fall."

"I cannot—I will not believe it!" John cried. "No harm shall come to you, my darling. I will stand between you and any possible danger that may threaten, to defend you with my life. There is nothing to fear,

and you must banish the dreadful thought at once."

"I have tried to do so, John, but I have tried in vain."

"But, tell me, love, what possible danger can be threatening you?"

"Oh! I do not know; but I do know it is hovering over me, and its shadow comes nearer each moment."

"It is impossible, Nydia, impossible. You are in the very bud of life; full of health and youthful vigor. Death dare not approach you. And as to enemies—"

"Enemies we have, John, as you know," was the quick interruption. "And it is our enemies I fear. No, do not laugh at me; I am terribly in earnest. Something tells me I shall never see Daisy Drift again."

Genteel John tried to force a laugh, to break the spell which had come over his bride's sunny nature, but he miserably failed.

"Our enemies," he cogitated; "pray who are they? I was on the point of saying we have no enemies."

"But you know we have," Nydia persisted. "Osmond Millfield is your enemy, and I fear him greatly. And there is Frances Cantril, who loved you so madly, and who threatened to destroy my happiness if you married me."

"We can laugh at them all," declared John. "We have nothing to fear from them, loved one."

"I hope not, oh! I hope not, John; but Madam Iredell and her daughter are here, in this very house; and such a look as Frances gave me in the hall—it almost made my heart stop beating."

The reader is entitled to a word of explanation just here.

Not only had John Heathcote had a rival, but Nydia Lyndon as well.

At Daisy Drift was a summer hotel, growing rapidly in favor and quite fashionable in a small way.

At this hotel, about the time when John Heathcote had come to Daisy Drift, had appeared one Madam Iredell and her daughter.

The daughter's name was Frances Cantril. She was a child of her mother's first marriage, a rather handsome girl, but far too austere—haughty.

She had fallen deeply in love with Genteel John at their first meeting, and had begun a desperate flirtation to draw him to her side; and John with nothing better to engage him, had lent himself for a time to her wiles.

But she had never succeeded in kindling one spark of love in his heart. There was nothing about her to awaken more than passing interest. Her mother, John had decided, was little better than a scheming adventuress, and the daughter promised fair to become the same.

With the coming to the camp of Nydia Lyndon, however, a flame of love had burst forth in John's breast at almost his first sight of her, and all hope that Frances Cantril had entertained regarding him was immediately dashed to the ground. This she soon realized; she tried to part him and Nydia; failing in this, she uttered a terrible threat against their happiness.

"You have nothing to fear from any of them," John tried to reassure, responding to the last words of his bride. "They can do you no harm here, and to-morrow we will go on to Daisy Drift."

Could he have foreseen what was to follow, not another hour would Nydia have been allowed to remain in that house.

But, chosen of Destiny for the role he must play, he could not foresee, much less avert.

The rest of the afternoon was spent in their room.

By persistent effort John at last succeeded in diverting Nydia's thoughts, in some degree, and she became more cheerful.

They had supper served in their room, as neither had any desire to meet Millfield, Miss Cantril or Madam Iredell, and they knew they were likely to meet one or all of them at the table.

A little while after their supper was over, some of Nydia's callers of the afternoon returned, with others, and after chatting with them for awhile John excused himself and went down to the reading-room to smoke a cigar, with the desire still in his mind to meet his step-father, Hon. Murdock Kinross.

Stopping at the office he looked at the register.

The last name inscribed thereon was that of the man he desired to encounter.

Turning from the register he looked around the room, and while he looked Mr. Kinross came in from the dining-room.

He was a man of fifty or thereabouts, portly, and with a very self-important air. His dress was "loud," he wore a gold chain of massive links across his vest, and a huge seal adorned the little finger of his left hand.

He crossed over in the direction of the office desk, and was almost upon John before he recognized him.

When their eyes met a slight pallor was seen for a moment upon the face of the Honorable.

"I see you recognize me," Murdock Kinross, John addressed him at once.

"Yes, young scalawag," was the loud-mouthed retort, "I recognize you. What do you want?"

Kinross spoke loudly enough to draw attention, and all who were present turned to learn what was going on.

"I want what is due me, for one thing, and that first and foremost," was the young man's cool retort. "I want justice at your hands."

"Bah! I don't know what you are talking about!" cried Kinross. "I owe you nothing; or if I do, just name the sum and I will discharge the debt here and now."

With that he thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out some small change, displaying it so that all might see. It was an insult, it was intended as such, and it raised a laugh at John's expense.

"Put up your change!" John said, calmly, and his words were clear and ringing. "What I want is the fortune you robbed me of—the fortune that was left me by my father, who mistook you for an honest man when he appointed you my guardian, intrusting it to your care."

"You infernal young upstart!" the Honorable cried in rage, "what do you mean by such talk to me? I've a notion to twist your nose for you. What would you be to-day if it hadn't been for me? Your fortune, as you call it, was spent upon you long ago, and the case has been properly settled by the courts. Get out of my sight, you whelp!"

"You are a liar, sir," retorted John, coolly, calmly. "Never one penny of it have I received in any manner whatever. You even tried to appropriate the little my mother had wisely set apart for my education, as it will not be hard for me to prove. To your brutal treatment her early death was due, proof of which I have. This, gentlemen," to the bystanders, "is the Honorable Murdock Kinross, robber of—"

With a snarl of rage Kinross sprang forward and dealt John a slap on the cheek, cutting him short.

The next instant he would have been sent flying across the room, but John held back the blow which his muscles were already strung to deliver.

"No, I will not strike you," he forced himself to say. "You are an older man than I. But, bear in mind, Murdock Kinross, that I will never forget, and sooner or later you shall be brought to account for the wrongs you have done me."

"Bah! get out of my sight before I strike you again!" Kinross cried. "You are only a cur, at best. You are a nobody, and you have no claim upon me. Out of my sight, I say! The only moment of respectability you or your tribe ever knew was when I condescended to marry your mother—"

With a bound Genteel John was upon him, his hands at his throat.

"You dare to mention her name!" he cried. "Her blood is upon your head and—"

The bystanders interfered, and the young man was pulled away by force, leaving Kinross pale and trembling.

In a moment John had recovered himself, ceased to struggle, and was released by those who had been holding him for the few brief seconds.

"Thank you, gentlemen, for your interference," he spoke. "I might have done the brute some lasting harm. But, mind you, Murdock Kinross," shaking his fist at the

now badly frightened Honorable, "your day of reckoning will come."

And with that the young man turned and left the room, not wanting to trust himself longer in the presence of this man whom he hated so heartily—hated with just and sufficient cause.

When he had gone and Kinross had recovered himself in a measure, the rascally "Honorable" gave the witnesses to the scene the benefit of his version of the matter, speaking of John in by no means enviable terms.

John had gone out to the piazza, where he lighted a cigar and paced up and down for a time to quiet his nerves.

By the time the cigar was half consumed he was himself again, and throwing the weed away he entered the house and went up to his room.

His bride's callers were about taking their leave, and soon he and Nydia were alone together.

Nydia was quite cheerful, now, and engaged John in a sprightly talk that lasted till a late hour. It was near midnight before they thought of sleep.

About the time when they realized how late it was, and began preparations for retiring, there came a knock at their door.

John opened it, and a call-boy delivered a telegram into his hand, greatly to his surprise.

Tearing it open immediately, its contents surprised him still more.

It was dated or headed "city," and read as follows:

"I am in town. Come at once to the house. Must see you. Of the greatest importance."

The message was signed Jackson Lyndon, and closing the door John turned to Nydia and read it aloud to her. It puzzled them, to understand why her brother was in Denver. Nydia, all atremble, urged John to go at once. Perhaps it was Jackson who was threatened with danger; not herself!

The second shadow of that terrible destiny was upon them.

CHAPTER III.

GENTEEL JOHN FALSELY ACCUSED.

JOHN made hasty preparations to set out.

Kissing his bride a tender good-by, he started, with a promise to return as quickly as possible.

Their room was on the second floor, in the left wing of the hotel, and it was quite a distance down to the main entrance, through two halls of considerable length.

Genteel John passed along the first hall at a lively pace, turned into the second and hastened on to the stairs, down which he hurried with light, springy steps, and was nearing the bottom when a horrible thing happened.

He heard a groan, followed by running steps; then other and heavier steps as of a drunken man, just below him. The next instant a man staggered into sight, and as John reached the bottom of the stairs, for he had not stopped, the man fell upon the floor at his feet.

And, that was not all. John noted with horror that the hot life element was spurted from a wound in his back, from which a knife had been dislodged when he fell. And, and more to his horror still, he recognized the man. It was his step-father, Hon. Murdock Kinross, with whom he had so recently quarreled!

Before John could stop, for it had all taken place within a period of three seconds, he had reached the bottom and one foot was actually touching the dying man, and there for the moment he stood, all but paralyzed with horror.

And almost at the same time the front door opened and two men stepped into the hall, one of whom was Osmond Millfield.

They, too, stopped short; like John, for the instant horrified.

In almost the same moment, too, yet a fraction later, a side door opened, and several men came out from the office, evidently guests about to retire.

"Heavens! What's this?" one of the latter exclaimed.

"It looks like a murder!" another echoed.

"And it is a murder, gentlemen," spoke Osmond Millfield, coming toward them from the front door; "and this man," pointing at Genteel John, "is the murderer!"

John Heathcote quickly realized the dangerous predicament he was in.

It was plain that Millfield meant to swear against him falsely, catching at this opportunity for revenge.

"You utter a damnable lie!" he cried hotly, stepping over the body and facing his accuser. "As God is my witness, you speak a black, a monstrous lie!"

Millfield smiled sneeringly.

"That bold, blustering front will not serve you," he returned. "I saw you do the hellish deed. We opened the door just as you struck the blow, and as your victim fell you dropped the knife."

"Your words are as false as you are infamous!" cried John.

"I submit it to my companion, Mr. Sparkers," quietly referred Millfield.

"It is the truth, what you say," that worthy promptly supported. "I witnessed it myself."

Genteel John felt the blood recede from his face, and a chilliness seized him. How was he to disprove this damning evidence?

"And I swear that you lie, both of you!" he cried. "I was coming down the stairs and was near the bottom when this man staggered and fell where he lies, right in front of me."

You opened the door a moment later. By all that I hold sacred, gentlemen, I am innocent of this charge."

"It is no use," sneered Millfield. "We saw you do the deed, and I guess our word will be taken against yours. I am pretty confident that mine will, anyhow. Gentlemen, we must arrest this fellow."

The loud talking had attracted others from the office, and now there were a dozen in the hall.

John stepped back, displaying a revolver.

"I am innocent, gentlemen," he declared again, "and I shall resist arrest. I warn you to keep your hands off me."

"Who is the murdered man?" inquired the night clerk.

The man was lying face downward, and had now ceased to breathe.

"It looks like the man the accused had the high words with early in the evening," was suggested.

The clerk and another laid hold upon the dead man and turned the body over, so that the face might be seen.

"So it is, sure enough!" the clerk exclaimed.

"And he made threats against him, if you remember," Millfield recalled.

"I made no threat against his life," cried John. "I am no murderer, and I warn you to keep your distance."

"Then who did do the deed?" asked the clerk.

"I don't know," John answered. "I heard a groan, immediately followed by steps running toward the rear of the hall, and the next moment the man fell at my feet as I reached the bottom of the stairs. God knows I speak the truth."

"And we know that you speak a lie!" cried Millfield. "Men, I charge him with the murder of Murdock Kinross. Arrest him at once!"

Genteel John's eyes flashed, and his revolver came up breast high.

"Again I declare my innocence, and I warn you to keep off," he cried. "I am suddenly called out by a telegram, and must respond. After that I will return. Stand out of my way."

The door had been left open behind Millfield and his companion, and John moved toward it.

"Stop him!" cried Millfield, placing himself in the way. "If we allow him to get out of our hands now, it may give the authorities trouble to find him. He must not escape. We must capture him at all—"

John's fist closed his mouth, cutting short his words, and he was sent ingloriously into a corner, while John cleared the intervening space with a bound, and was gone.

A few swift-running strides carried him to the end of the piazza, a leap landed him upon the sidewalk, and in a few moments he had turned a street corner and was out of sight, for the time being safe.

He had pulled the door to behind him on leaving the hall of the hotel, and two or three men springing after him at once, all fumbling for the knob together and hin-

dering one another greatly; by the time they got the door open, John had disappeared.

"He's gone!" cried the man Sparkers. "We must put the police after him as soon as possible!"

"I'm afraid he's likely to get away now," remarked the clerk. "We shouldn't have allowed him to get out of our hands like that."

"Don't see how it was to be helped," observed one. "I guess none of us wanted to get shot. See how he upset the man who did try to stop him. He was desperate."

"Yes," cried Millfield, who had gathered himself up and now appeared upon the piazza; "and don't his action prove his guilt? It would be enough, almost, even if we hadn't witnessed it as we did. That man must be taken."

Meanwhile John was hastening from the scene.

His brain was in a whirl, the result of the recent horror and excitement.

He had acted upon the impulse of a moment, feeling it imperative that he should obey the summons from Jackson Lyndon.

To have submitted to arrest would have balked his responding to the urgent telegram, and he knew it must be something of greatest importance that had led Jackson to send for him.

But, this awful crime, and the horrible accusation that had been made against him!—made against him falsely!

Had he not, by his actions, added to the weight of appearances against himself? He feared so; yet, he would do the same again under like circumstances.

But, then, was he in such frightful danger? He could prove the telegram; he could prove by Jackson Lyndon why he had been summoned; and would not the truth rise triumphant? Still the danger of his situation was not to be underestimated.

As his mind grew more calm, the darker the dilemma rose before him. He had quarreled with his step-father that evening, and had uttered threats. Worst of all, two men averred that they had witnessed the crime, declaring that he was the man who had struck the blow.

There was but one thing to do, and that was to submit to arrest and trust the matter to Providence. Knowing his innocence, he believed the truth would be established and that he would be cleared of the horrible charge. To run away would be equivalent to admitting himself guilty, in the public mind. That would never do.

He pressed on, wondering what Jack could want of him, and thinking of the frightened bride he had left at the hotel. Would she hear of this matter before he could get back again? He hoped not. How would she stand it when the horrible news was broken to her? Could it be that *this* was what had been preying upon her mind and heart in premonitory influence?

Making all possible haste, he arrived in due time at the Lyndon residence.

The house was closed and dark, and there was not a sign of life anywhere about it.

Truth to tell, Jackson Lyndon was at that hour sound asleep in the family cottage at Daisy Drift. He had not been in Denver at all!

The message John had received had been a decoy. A great and terrible blow was soon to fall, blasting his happiness and changing forever the purpose of his life. It was grim Destiny's decree.

Unmindful of appearances, John sprang up the steps and rung the bell. Of course there was no response. He rung again and again, but the result was the same.

"If he has been here he has gone away again," John mentally decided. "Still, I'll give it one more trial."

He rattled the bell once more, and waited. And while he stood there he fancied the night was growing lighter. The door had become more plainly visible.

It must be his imagination, he thought. But, no; it was growing brighter still; and, see, his shadow appears on the side of the doorway, and—Ha! the alarm of fire is heard!

John wheeled around instantly and looked. Off in the direction from which he had come was the crimson glare.

The fire seemed to be further away than the hotel, and with a thought for Nydia and

how frightened she would be, John sprang down from the stoop and set out on a run.

Thoughts of the recent murder and his own peril were out of mind now, and he was concerned only for his bride. What if the hotel itself were on fire! That thought seemed to lend wings to his speed, and he seemed no time in reaching the neighborhood of the hotel.

As he turned the last corner, what was his horror to find the hotel all ablaze, with the angry serpent-tongues of flame darting forth from almost every window. He paused not, but with the single thought of rescuing his bride, hastened on and plunged into the doomed building.

CHAPTER IV.

DESTINY CLAIMS HER VICTIM.

THE hotel was a wooden structure, almost as dry as tinder, and when the fire was discovered it was too late to do anything to save the building. The alarm was given, of course, but it was without hope that the firemen could do more than protect adjoining property.

At the time of the discovery most of the guests of the house were asleep in their rooms, while those who were awake were mostly in the hall where the terrible murder had been so recently committed. The main body of the building was speedily wrapped in flames, cutting off escape from the wings almost entirely, especially the left.

From the right wing was a rear stairway, but from the left there was none, so the guests in the right had slightly the advantage. The cry of fire was sounded as soon as the discovery was made, and every effort made to arouse the inmates, but the spread of the flames was so rapid that it was immediately feared that many would be cut off and lost. Those below, escaped, of course, carrying the body of the murdered man with them.

A large crowd had gathered and the excitement was great when Genteel John made his appearance, and he pushed his way to the front without respect or regard for any one who happened to be in his way.

Was not the life of his bride at stake? Should he pause at such a time as that? Heaven forbid the thought of personal danger!

Forward he plunged, as said, and into the doomed building from which even the firemen had withdrawn.

"That's the murderer!" some one shouted, as he disappeared.

"Yes, that's him! But he's gone to his death; he'll never come out of that furnace alive."

"If he does we'll have him," declared a policeman who had been made aware of the terrible tragedy that had taken place.

"You'll never get anything but his ashes," averred a fireman. "The building is going to fall in less than another minute; I'm betting on it."

And so remark and comment ran.

Genteel John had heard no words save the first, which stung him to the quick.

A murderer—he who had never done harm to a fellow being in all his life, so far as he knew. *A murderer.*

The words rung in his ears as he bounded up the stairs, dashing into the blinding and suffocating cloud of smoke and the scorching breath of flames, heeding them not.

He knew the way; turned into the left wing; dashed along the hall; turned into the next hall; and still on to the room where he knew his bride had been, where he hurled himself against the door without trying it.

The door gave way with a crash and he was precipitated into the room headlong, out of breath and almost ready to fall. Catching up a chair he shivered one of the windows with a single blow and thrust his head out to get another breath, which he must have or perish.

He wasted no time. There was no time to lose. All the windows below were pouring forth tongues of flame, and the air was so hot that it was almost blistering his skin. He sprang to the bed, feeling for the form of his loved one, but she was not there. He felt for the chair where he had left her sitting. It was empty. He groaned in despair.

Then, suddenly, and for the first time, came the thought that perhaps she had already made her escape.

If that were so, then he must not delay another second or he would never get out alive himself. He could not live another minute in such a hell as that.

Taking one more breath at the window he dashed out into the hall, which was now lighted by the glare of flames that had licked through in many places, and started for the stairs with desperate speed.

As he turned the bend in the first hall a breath of cold air fanned his face and partly cleared the smoke away, and there in the glare, leaning against the wall, he saw his bride, her face pale, her hands clasped, and despair plainly stamped upon her countenance.

With a bound he was at her side, grasping her arm.

"Nydia!" he cried, joyfully.

"John!"

"Quick, my love! Get upon my back! I will save you or we will perish here together! Quick! Quick!"

With the command he dropped upon one knee in front of her, his back toward her, taking this means of carrying her in order to have the free use of his hands and arms.

He did not see what took place in that critical moment.

A turn in the air brought a furnace blast from the opposite direction, and feeling a pair of arms clasped around his neck he rose and started with his burden in the direction of the stairs.

He could not know that it was not his bride he carried; that at the fatal moment another person had pushed her aside and had taken her place. He heard a scream, but he had heard more than one since entering the doomed building. He was powerless to help any one save his bride, and he might not be able to rescue even her.

When he came to the staircase, the roar of the flames was deafening and the intense heat overpowering. A weaker man might have succumbed there and then, but not so Genteel John. He had a will of iron, and his muscles were as muscles of steel. Down he dashed, right through the flames, and out upon the piazza and to the street before he fell. And then fall he did, from sheer want of breath, while a cheer went up from the crowd.

The woman he carried fell with him, of course, and she was insensible.

A few moments of time, a few deep breaths taken, and Genteel John was able to rise to his knees, and his first thought being for his bride he looked for her.

The woman whom he had carried out from the burning hotel lay near him, her face upturned toward the sky, the light of the fire making her features plainly visible and ghastly in appearance.

At sight of her face Genteel John uttered a cry that was almost a scream.

It was not the face of his wife! It was not his bride he had carried from the flames! This woman was Frances Cantrill!

"My God!" he cried. "This is not my wife! How came this mistake? I had her in my arms; I know it was she; but now—God help me, I will save her even yet! I will save her or die with her!"

And with his words he made another dash for the main entrance, which was now pouring forth a solid sheet of whitest flames.

"Back!" cried a fireman.

"Back! back!" cried others. "It is sure death to venture there!"

John heeded them not, but plunged madly, blindly on, firmly resolved to save his wife or die with her.

Now he could see through it all; now he could understand that scream he had heard; now he realized the momentary delay when he was urging Nydia to make haste in getting upon his shoulders.

This other woman, this daughter of an adventuress, had pushed Nydia aside and taken her place, thus to save her own life at the cost of a hated rival. It was all too plain.

John would have rushed on to certain death had it not been for the policeman who had made his boast that he would capture him if he came out of the house alive.

The officer blocked his way with club raised, commanding him to stop, and laid hold upon him to enforce his command.

Even this would have been of no avail, but while John was trying to shake this

man off others fell upon him, and he was overpowered in spite of his struggles.

"Heavens! are you human?" the struggling man fiercely demanded. "My wife is in that building—Do you understand what I say? My wife is in there—*my wife!* I must save her! I must—I *will* save her! Let me go, or it will be the worse for you!"

But at that moment the end came.

With a terrible crash and roar the building collapsed, sending a myriad of sparks skyward, and Genteel John sunk to the ground utterly overcome, weeping like a child.

Who can describe the scene that followed?

Thousands of persons were upon the spot, and cries and lamentations were heard on every hand from those who believed they had lost loved ones in the ruins.

The shouting of the firemen, the panting of the engines, the roaring of the flames, the cries of the people, all together went to make up a scene of terror and confusion.

And in the midst of it all the grief of this one stricken man was as merely a drop in the sea. What had happened was not known save to the few who had heard his words and who now looked upon his grief.

Many had witnessed his brave act in rescuing the woman from the flames, and all supposed it must be some one near and dear to him—no doubt his wife; but few knew the terrible truth of it all, and no one could realize it as he realized it himself.

From that moment Genteel John moved like one in a dream.

He was in the apathy of utter despair.

Taken to the police station, charged with the murder of Murdock Kinross, imprisoned in a cell—through it all he seemed not to realize anything.

His mind was all but shattered, with the terrible events of the hour of agony through which he had passed. He recalled Nydia's premonition, and her grief at the thought of being taken from him.

How true her prophecy had been! How speedy and awful its fulfillment! How dark a cloud had settled upon his life when all had seemed so very bright!

On the following morning the newspapers came out with full and glowing accounts of everything.

The murder at the hotel; the fire immediately afterward; the arrest of the murderer; the list of the lost; everything in true newspaper style, and news flew rapidly.

Friends of the Lyndons saw the mention of Colonel Mark's daughter given in the list of the dead, and word was sent to Daisy Drift with all speed possible. Others interested themselves in John Heathcote, and one of the best lawyers of the day was engaged in his behalf.

There was an examination, the result of which was to send the innocent man to jail to await trial upon the strength of the testimony given by Osmond Millfield and his tool, Joel Sparkers. The prisoner could only tell his story, the truth; but in the face of the strong, positive and circumstantial evidence against him there could be but the one result.

CHAPTER V.

A NEW HOPE BORN.

THE trial of John Heathcote was a long and tedious one.

His lawyer, believing fully in his client's innocence, had put forth every effort to establish it.

Detectives had been employed, and every effort made to ferret out the mystery and bring the guilty one to account, but all in vain. Nothing could be discovered that would throw any light upon the matter.

On the other hand, the prosecution had a complete case. The circumstantial evidence alone was enough to convict, and when it was backed up with the sworn testimony of eye-witnesses, it made the chain doubly strong. The verdict was a foregone conclusion.

The prisoner had lost the telegram he had received on that fatal night, and his statement was made so much the weaker. Detectives had visited every telegraph office in the city, but no record of any such message was to be found. The prosecution made a point of that, thus clinching another rivet in the terrible chain. The case against the unfortunate man was complete,

Genteel John could not account for a single minute of the time he had been absent from the hotel. His only witness, the only person who had seen that fatal telegram, was dead, and that was his wife. The only redeeming feature about the whole matter was the fact that he had returned to the hotel, but even that the prosecution distorted into a selfish motive. And so, when the lawyer for the prosecution had done, it was plain to be seen that he had carried conviction.

The last address of the defense was strong, even stronger than might have been looked for. It showed the prisoner's past record without a blemish upon it anywhere. It proved the shady reputation of Joel Sparkers beyond doubt. And, too, it showed that Osmond Millfield had been the prisoner's rival for the hand of Nydia Lyndon, and so, naturally, would have no love for the prisoner. It showed how well Heathcote still retained the confidence of the sorrowing father and mother upon whom their daughter's frightful fate had fallen with such terrible force.

But, in spite of all, the verdict was—*guilty*.

There were stubborn facts in the case that would not be covered—that no amount of argument could cover. The fact that the prisoner had hated his step-father, albeit with good cause; the fact that he had quarreled with him only a little time before the deed was done; the fact that he had been discovered, by at least half a dozen witnesses, standing over the dying man; the fact that two of these witnesses swore that they had seen him strike the blow. Then, too, the additional points that no blood had been found further back in the hall than the foot of the steps, although the prisoner declared the victim had come staggering from that direction as he descended the stairs.

It could not be wondered at that the verdict was what it was.

And, according to such a verdict, there could be but one sentence, and John Heathcote was accordingly sentenced to be hanged.

The case had been one of greatest interest, owing to the prominence of the murdered man and the high standing of the Lyndons, with whom, being the husband of their daughter, the prisoner's name was associated.

Colonel Lyndon and the lawyer fought hard even after the sentence had been pronounced, but all to no purpose. There was no sufficient grounds upon which to demand a new trial, and an appeal to the higher court was overruled.

Genteel John had passed through the trying time with that same dull apathy that had come upon him at the moment when the burning hotel had fallen in, burying beneath its ruins his fair young bride. He had no hope, and seemed to care little what his fate might be.

Even when he heard his sentence pronounced it seemed to make no difference to him. He had nothing to live for, he had declared, and it mattered little how soon he died or in what manner his death came to him.

It was not until a week after he had received his sentence that he showed any difference in manner in these respects.

The change came upon him after a visit had been made to his cell by Colonel Lyndon.

"You say you have nothing to live for," the colonel remarked on that occasion; "you have everything to live for, John."

"And Nydia dead? You do not realize what you are saying," was the prisoner's response.

"You mistake; I do realize what I am saying."

"Well, what have I to live for, then?"

"To make a fight for right and revenge—right and revenge!"

For a moment a terrible flame burned in Genteel John's eyes, and his nostrils dilated as his breathing came hard. The next moment, with a sad smile, he sunk into his former despair.

"Why was this not spoken of before?" he asked. "Then I might have made a harder fight at my trial."

"Impossible. Your defense was all that it possibly could be. Your lawyer worked harder for you than he had ever worked on any case in his life. It was of no use, for everything was against you."

"Then why mention it at all, now that it is too late?"

"Is it too late?"

"Am I not awaiting the day of my execution?"

"You have not been hanged yet, have you? You are alive, are you not?"

Genteel John caught the colonel's wrist and looked steadily, in his face to read his meaning.

"What do you mean?" he panted. "What hope do you hold out to me? Is there the ghost of chance that I may escape and live for the purpose you have mentioned?"

"If there were not I would not have spoken of it."

That keen light flashed forth again in the prisoner's eyes, and his face assumed such an expression as it had never worn before.

"Let me only escape," he panted. "Let me only get free, and I swear that I will devote my life to hunting down the murderer and clearing myself of this terrible crime. And not only that, but I will have revenge upon the human devils who placed the rope around my neck."

"You have said enough," spoke the colonel, then. "There are more men than one who believe you are innocent, and some step is going to be made to effect your escape. But, once you have escaped, your work will be rendered doubly difficult. Large rewards will be offered for your recapture, you will be hounded to the death, almost, and nowhere will you be safe."

"I care nothing for that. Only give me the chance, and I will prove to you and all the world that I am innocent of that crime."

"Well, the chance will probably be yours, but I am unable to say just how or when. Be prepared to accept it at any hour, day or night."

"I will be ready."

"And, remember, at Daisy Drift you have an asylum at any time you see fit to take advantage of it, but, as it is known that I am friendly disposed toward you, I presume my house will be watched continually."

"Let them watch. Once I am free, they will never retake me. Only let me have my liberty, and I will lead them the grandest man hunt they ever enjoyed. You have filled me with a hope, Colonel Lyndon; see to it that it is not dashed to the ground. I depend upon your help."

And so, as said, from that time a change came over him.

Not that he was anything like his former self; the old smile had gone, perhaps forever.

But there was upon his face such a look of determination, such a grim expression of fixed resolve, that it was the wonder of all who saw him. No one guessed what it meant.

Some weeks passed; the hope was not realized.

He did not lose heart, however. He waited on, and day by day his face became more and more set in its look.

The lines had hardened, the keen eyes fairly burned, the jaws had become set and firm in the one-fixed resolve that must shape his future—if he escaped his fate.

One day a visitor was announced, and a veiled woman entered his cell.

She sat down, and as she did so said, in a low, impressive tone that he never forgot:

"John Heathcote, I am here to serve you. Do not ask who I am, whence I came, or anything whatever about me; listen well to what I have to say."

"Say on, Madam Mystery," John invited.

"You have well named me," was the sad-toned acknowledgment. "I am a mystery to you now, and so I must ever remain. I am here with a purpose, and that purpose is to set you free."

She spoke in a very low, impressive tone. "I have been expecting you," said the prisoner.

The woman gazed at him for a moment in silence from behind her veil.

"Well, I am here, and you are not disappointed," she made return, presently. "Now, hear my scheme."

"Let me hear it."

"You are a strong man."

"I am no weakling, at any rate."

"I can believe that. Very well. Your supper will be brought to you at six o'clock."

"Yes."

"The door has to be opened in order for it to be passed in."

"Yes."

"Good. I am going to free your hands, and when your supper is brought you must seize the jailer and put him in your place."

"There is a good deal of risk about that."

"No; scarcely any. He will be in no condition to resist you, for I have attended to him. You must take his hat and coat, and immediately pass out with the pitcher in your hand as if to get water."

"Every man about the place knows me, though," John objected.

"No matter; you will find that no one will notice you. Go straight to the water fount in the yard, fill your pitcher, set it down, and at once step into the hall on your right and go through to the street."

"And what then?"

"From that moment everything will depend upon yourself. I can do no more for you. This is your only chance; see that you do not lose it. Now, not a word, for I will answer no questions, I am going."

And calling to the turnkey she was let out of the cell, when she hastened away at once. Who or what she was, Genteel John could not know.

CHAPTER VI.

ESCAPE OF THE PRISONER.

WHEN the woman had gone, Genteel John could hardly realize that he had had a visitor at all.

It seemed so strange, so unreal, that he was inclined to believe that he had been dreaming. That there was such a hope for escape did not seem possible.

There was proof, however, that he had not dreamed it—that his visitor had been no shadowy spirit born of the imagination, for his hands were free and the galling chains lay on the floor at his feet.

No; it was all real enough, and he realized that his friends had not failed him.

"Colonel Lyndon did not lead me to hope in vain," he mused. "He has kept his word with me, and now it remains for me to keep the oath I have taken."

Picking up the cuffs and chains, which he had dropped to the floor after his visitor had gone out, he laid them on his wrists and lap in the manner in which he had been used to sitting, and waited.

Many times his jailer came to the door and looked in, to see that he was all right, and no suspicion was aroused. He was found sitting in his usual position; his head bowed, and he was disturbed. And so passed the afternoon away, and evening came on.

At six o'clock his supper was brought, and the door was unlocked.

The prisoner being handcuffed and chained, it was perfectly safe to open the door, for he could do no harm even if so inclined.

John noticed that on this occasion the man had a draggy step and a decidedly sleepy appearance, as he came in, and realized that the woman had been true to her promise.

"You look sleepy, Jim," the prisoner observed.

"And I am sleepy, too," was the response. "I'll bet I won't be out o' bed long this night."

"You ought to keep better hours."

"I was up late last night, and that's the fact; but it never used me quite as bad as this afore. There's your grub; go into it."

"How about water? I guess the pitcher is about empty."

The warden stepped forward to the corner where the pitcher was, and as he stooped to take it up Genteel John laid hold upon him, one hand at his throat and the other closing his mouth.

"I don't want to hurt you, Jim," he said, "but if you make a sound I will. I am going out of here. Stop your struggling, and I'll let up; if you don't I'll choke the wind out of you. Take your choice."

The fellow was like a child in the hands of so powerful a man, and he submitted immediately without another effort.

Genteel John relaxed his grip upon his throat, and with a quick movement snapped the handcuffs upon the fellow's wrists, yet holding his mouth with one hand the while.

His wrists secured, John proceeded to gag him, which was speedily done.

That accomplished, he had the fellow at

his mercy, and could proceed without fear of his calling for help.

Freeing his hands, he made him remove his coat and vest, and when he had handcuffed him again Genteel John put on the fellow's garments and hat and was ready to go out.

"Don't give an alarm, Jim, if you value your health," he finally warned. "I will make you repent it if you do. I am innocent of the crime for which they would hang me, and I am going to prove it. You won't have to stay here long. I'm sorry if I have hurt you."

The new prisoner looked at him wonderingly.

Such words as these, coming from the lips of a desperate man making a bold stroke for life and liberty, were strange.

Genteel John took up the pitcher and left the cell, closing and locking the door after him, and passed boldly up the corridor, whistling a popular air which the warden had been in the habit of whistling.

No attention was paid to him, and he gained the yard in safety.

There he filled the pitcher, and following the woman's direction to the letter, set it down and immediately stepped into the hall on his right and passed through to the street.

He was free—free!

Making no unusual haste, he yet got out of the neighborhood as speedily as possible, and when safe for the time being, stopped to plan his further movements deliberately, carefully.

It was half an hour after his escape before his absence was discovered.

The warden of the prison, missing the warden, set out to look for him, with a result that was to be expected.

Immediately the alarm was raised, but the prisoner was by that time out of reach, and little could be done. The police were notified, and every possible step taken, but all in vain.

Next morning the newspapers came out with glowing headlines.

The murderer, John Heathcote, had escaped! A ferocious desperado was at large, and no life was safe!

And followed a full account of the manner of his escape; how he had almost killed one of the warders, and so forth, with more regard to sensational paragraphs than for strict facts.

The one great fact, however, was there: the man had escaped and was at large, and the law had not been satisfied. He must be retaken, no matter what the cost or the hazard. The people of the Commonwealth must see to it that justice was yet meted out to the murderer of Murdock Kinross!

And on the same page, too, was another great sensation.

One of the leading banks of the city had been robbed during the night, and a fortune in cash taken by the robber. The night-watchman had been overpowered in very much the same manner as the warden at the jail, being found in the morning bound and gagged and almost dead, while the safes were wide open and their contents scattered all over the floor.

Nothing had been taken, so far as known, but cash, and of that only the paper money. No gold or silver had been touched, being evidently too bulky, or rather, too heavy, for easy handling. And taking this fact into consideration, some logical deductions were drawn. Had the escaped murderer had a hand in the robbery? Guilty of so great a crime, this lesser one would be as nothing to him. Perhaps he had robbed the bank alone and unaided.

Escaping from the jail as he had, he certainly had no money, and money was as necessary to his successful flight as air was necessary for his life. Was he the robber? If so, he had chosen well in taking only the paper money, for that would be easy to carry and would not hamper his flight. The watchman had been left in nearly the same manner as the warden at the jail, and from what description he was able to give, the robber certainly corresponded in appearance with the escaped murderer.

And so it went on at some length, splitting hairs to make points.

Whether the papers were right or wrong but few could say, but the fact became

stubborn that the police could not unearth the robber.

There was not the slightest clue to work upon, and the description of the robber as given by the watchman would fit any number of men. It was not to be relied on.

The watchman was positive upon one point—that there had been but one man, a powerful fellow, who had overcome him with ease. Here the newspapers laid strong stress, too. The escaped murderer was a powerful fellow, and he certainly had had no companion.

The city of Denver was scoured that day, but John Heathcote was not to be found.

He had disappeared as utterly as though he had never been.

It was on the day following that Colonel Mark Lyndon entered the office of one of the noted private detectives of the city.

There he met the lawyer who had defended Heathcote at his trial, who was in consultation with the detective, and both were awaiting the arrival of the colonel. He entered in some excitement.

"What's this I hear?" he demanded. "I got your summons, and on the way here I learned that Heathcote has escaped. How did it come about?"

"Had you nothing to do with it?" asked the detective.

"Not a thing. Wasn't it your doings? Yours or the lawyer's, here?"

"Neither of us had anything to do with it," was the assurance; and the trio looked at one another in something of surprise.

"Then it is plain that he had no help," declared the colonel. "He has seen his opportunity and has taken advantage of it. All the better; we escape the dangerous risks we were about to run."

"Yes, it is better so," agreed the lawyer; "but our friend here says it was out of the question, his escaping without help."

"Then who in the name of wonders helped him?"

"I am not prepared to say," answered the detective, "but I do know he had help, and undoubtedly it was the woman who visited him in the afternoon. In fact, I am sure it was she; but who she was I do not know."

"But how could an unknown woman help him?"

"Perhaps she was not unknown to him."

"Even so, what could she do?"

"What she did do was evidently a great deal. In the first place, she certainly freed his hands so that he could grapple with the jailer, and she may also have supplied him with the means of disguise and escape. She was bold, and at the jail she passed herself off as the prisoner's aunt."

"He has no aunt, as I know very well," declared the colonel. "And who this woman can be, I cannot imagine. What is your opinion?"

"This to the detective.

"An opinion without proof to back it, sir, is nothing more than a guess," was the response.

"Well, then, let's hear what your guess is. You are accustomed to dealing with mysteries; your guess ought to be a good one."

"I have an idea that this mysterious woman may be one who had something to do with the murder, assuming the prisoner to have been innocent, as you both do."

"Ha! you may be right. Knowing his danger, and not wanting that he should suffer for a crime of which he was guiltless, she took upon herself the risk of aiding him to escape."

"That is the way it looks to me, gentlemen."

"And you may have hit the truth of it," agreed the lawyer. "Anyhow, let us be glad that his escape has been accomplished without our help. We are clear of it, and so the matter ends for us. I hope he will not be retaken, but that he may be successful in establishing his innocence."

CHAPTER VII.

THE BURSTING OF A BOMB-SHELL.

THE escaped murderer was not retaken; the bank-robber had not been arrested, the mystery was still unsolved.

Weeks had passed, and no one had heard from Genteel John, not even his most intimate and most trusted friends. Where he was, what he was doing, no one could say.

Those who held that he was the bank-robber, still harped upon that string, and its single note had become exceedingly rasping upon the ears of those who believed him innocent of either crime.

And those who believed this were those who knew him best.

Rewards had been posted, both for the capture of the escaped prisoner and for the arrest of the robber.

These rewards were everywhere.

Five thousand dollars was offered for the arrest of the murderer, as he was termed, and a full description of Heathcote was given.

This was signed by an official in high standing, and could any man have laid hand upon Genteel John, and have been successful in turning him over to the authorities, the reward would have been paid.

Then, too, the same amount was offered by the officials of the bank for the arrest of the robber who had spoiled them to the extent of five times that sum. So, if it were true that Genteel John and this bank-robber were one and the same, the successful man had a snug sum awaiting him.

In the mean time matters at Daisy Drift had settled down to an even pace, and while Genteel John was by no means forgotten, his name had come to be less frequently mentioned.

The death of their daughter in the hotel fire at Denver had been a terrible blow to the Lyndons, and they had by no means recovered from it. Added to that had been the disgrace the trial and conviction of Heathcote brought upon them.

The hotel at the pretty camp village was unusually full of guests, but the Lyndons were entirely out of society, of course, and they were missed greatly at all local events of a social nature.

At the hotel were Madam Iredell and her daughter, Frances Cantril, the girl whom Genteel John had saved from the burning hotel.

Heathcote had told few the true inwardness of that episode, and only the girl's own version of it had become current.

She was in the hall, as she explained, trying to grope her way out, and was probably near the room occupied by Heathcote and his bride, when a man, whom she took to be a fireman, seized her and flung her upon his shoulders and bore her out. She did not know who it was till she was told later.

Such had been her explanation, and now that it had become old it was seldom referred to.

With Genteel John branded a murderer and sentenced to be hanged, her love for him seemed suddenly to have cooled, and she could speak of him without any show of feeling.

It can be questioned whether she had any feeling of the womanly sort.

And, no sooner off with the old love than on with the new. The escaped prisoner being forever beyond her reach, and now wholly undesirable, she had set her snares in another direction.

Genteel John had made no mistake in estimating her character. Her mother was an adventuress, and she was no better. If she had honestly loved Heathcote, as perhaps she had so far as her nature was capable, that was a thing of the past. Now she was playing for money and position.

At the hotel, about this time, was a man who gave his name as Robert Woonstead.

He was a man of thirty-five or so, of good address, passably good-looking, and rich beyond question. He claimed to be an Englishman, and said he had come to the United States with the object in view of investing in mining interests.

At the Daisy Drift Hotel he had made the acquaintance of Osmond Millfield, a stockholder in the Job's Find, and when his object was known the Job's Find was brought to his notice as being about as good an investment as he could make. And so it came about that he invested five thousand dollars in the stock of that concern.

This was, as he said, merely as a starter. He did not want to go in too deeply till he understood more about American mines and American ways.

When this deal became known, Madam Iredell fixed her eyes upon the Englishman as a desirable match for her daughter, and

Frances began to lay siege to his heart immediately.

And their success in that direction was even better than they had hoped could be possible. The wealthy Englishman made no defense whatever, but quickly capitulated, and ere he had been six weeks at the camp village the engagement was announced.

It is not of a new and rough mining-camp we write, it must be borne in mind, hence the term "camp village." It had been a camp—was a camp still in some sense of the term; but it had grown into a pretty and popular summer resort, and was bidding fair to rival even Manitou at no far distant day.

When the engagement was announced local society was all agog.

Frances Cantril had not been the only one who had been angling in that direction, and she was looked upon with envy.

Congratulations, however, were not by any means backward. In fact, the disappointed ones, in order to hide their chagrin, were the foremost and most effusive in extending them.

Osmond Millfield complimented Woonstead highly upon his choice, and declared that American women were second only to American mines.

As he had never married, he was free to put it that way if he saw fit, and so he put it.

It need not be said that Millfield and Colonel Lyndon did not speak.

Believing thoroughly in the innocence of John Heathcote, the colonel knew that he, Millfield, had given false testimony out of pure revenge.

He might have been satisfied with stating the facts as they were, for the circumstantial evidence had been black enough, but he had gone further and sealed the innocent young man's fate.

Provided always that Heathcote was innocent, and those who believed thoroughly that he was were few in number. And so believing, they believed Millfield to be the liar and worse that we know him to have been. Still, they were helpless without proof.

The two, Millfield and Lyndon, had had one fierce war of words over the matter, since that terrible night, and from that moment had not spoken.

Millfield was carrying himself as an upright man would, a man who had done his duty in a trying time without fear or favor, and he had the support and sympathy of the majority.

But, to return:

Shortly following the announcement of the engagement between Robert Woonstead and Frances Cantril, had come the further announcement of their wedding, soon to take place there at the hotel in the village.

The Englishman had pressed his suit, and there being no good reason for delay, much less any desire on the part of either the father or daughter, on the principle of "many a slip," etc., they had given way to him and preparations were begun at once for as grand an affair of the kind as could be gotten up.

And so, in society there, and even to a certain extent at Denver also, there was an unusual stir over the forthcoming event.

The Englishman was lavish with his money, and no expense was spared to make it the greatest event of that or any other kind that Daisy Drift had ever witnessed. And he succeeded.

The day of the wedding came, and Daisy Drift was filled to overflowing with people from Denver and other places nearer by.

The abilities of the humble village hotel being inadequate to the occasion, especial talent had been brought from the city to prepare the grand supper that was to follow the ceremony.

The wedding was to take place in the evening at nine, and the supper was to follow at midnight after the intervening time had been spent in dancing. It was, altogether, likely to eclipse anything that had taken place that season, even at Denver or famed Manitou.

Evening came, and finally the looked-for hour.

Two ministers were on hand to tie the knot as elaborately as possible, and the rooms were filled with guests.

Nearly all the cottages in the camp were ablaze with light, for it being a society event

all society was taking part; but the Lyndon cottage was as dark as a tomb.

Finally, in the main parlor of the hotel, the two ministers took their stand under a huge floral arch that had been erected, and the happy couple, with their attendants, entered and drew up before them, and the ceremony began.

It not only began, but ended, and Robert Woonstead and Frances Cantril were pronounced man and wife.

When the final words had been pronounced, and before the crowd could press forward to congratulate the couple, there came an unusual noise upon the hotel piazza.

It had the sound of heavy steps, but they were certainly heavier than any human could make. It was more like the tread of a horse. And at the same time loud exclamations were heard.

These were followed by screams from the women who were in the hall and the front part of the room, and while the crowd remained spellbound, wondering what could be the cause of it all, into the parlor came a horse and rider, to the terror and amazement of all.

The rider was clad in black from crown to toe, and over his face was a black mask. A cloak of sable hue hung from his shoulders.

The horse, as black as ink, had over it a heavy black cloth which hung like a pall all around, secured front and rear, having the appearance, except in color, of the caparison of medieval times.

Slowly to the front this mysterious rider rode, through the aisle that had been left open for the bride and groom and their attendants, and scarcely any one moved or spoke, all being filled with awe at so strange an apparition at such a time and upon such an occasion.

The bride and groom had turned to receive the congratulations of their friends and the assembled guests, and now, with faces of ashen hue they stood spellbound before this mysterious being.

The attendants had fallen back, and the horseman stopped within a few feet of the newly married couple.

"Robert Woonstead and Frances," the rider spoke, then, in full, distinct tone, "let me be the first to congratulate you upon this happy occasion. Frances, you are to be envied; while you, sir, deserve nothing worse than to be sentenced to spend the remainder of your days in the society of this charming woman."

Then it was that the bride, the groom, guests—all took the matter in the light of a joke some friend had taken the liberty to play upon them.

"But who are you?" asked the groom with a smile of expectancy.

The answer was like a thunderbolt from a cloudless sky:

"I am John Heathcote, better known as Genteel John, or, as I have chosen to style myself, the Detective Outlaw!"

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE MYSTERY CLEARED AWAY.

Who can describe such a scene as then ensued?

Women screamed, men exclaimed, and many sought safety in immediate flight from the room.

The faces of bride and groom took on the hue of death, and the two reverend gentlemen tried to excel each other in the celerity of their retreat.

Now, to both Woonstead and Frances Cantril, came the true significance of the congratulations: this daring man had spoken. They could understand the hidden meaning of his words.

Not that they understood it, each the meaning as it applied to the other, but each as it applied to *self*. They were soon to see it in its fuller light, however.

As he spoke the thrilling words the black rider's horse appeared to grow restless, and wheeling partly around it backed to a corner near which the bridal party had stood, and there, as he faced the crowd, the rider appeared with a glittering revolver in his grasp.

Excitement were a tame word to express the furor.

There were reporters present, men who had been sent on purpose to write up this

event, and they were too excited to put pencil to paper.

There were detectives in the room, men who had been waiting at Daisy Drift for weeks in the hope of catching Genteel John, and they were powerless to make a move to arrest him.

In less time than it has taken to read these lines the room was half emptied; but there was still a good crowd present, those who were either powerless to move or had the grit to stand their ground to see the matter through. There were both classes.

"Citizens of Daisy Drift," spoke Genteel John, before the spell was broken, "and you, reporters, detectives, all; hear what I have to say: Since my escape from prison at Denver I have been upon the trail of the robber of the — Bank. I found him weeks ago, but the desire for personal revenge had led me to postpone his arrest, or exposure, till now."

Robert Woonstead was still white to the lips, and his face was bathed in a damp of perspiration.

He could hardly stand, and had taken hold of the back of a chair for support to steady himself. His bride had drawn apart from him, her eyes wild with an expectancy of horror.

"I will now point him out to you, detectives who are eager to achieve fame and fortune in his capture and my own, and you can make the arrest. There he stands: the trembling, cowardly wretch; Radcliffe Royce, *alias* Robert Woonstead, *alias* a dozen other names; the husband of at least seven deserted wives; a man who has served one term in State's Prison; thief, forger, and what not. There he is, and here are all the proofs needed to convict him of this crime."

As he spoke, Genteel John took a packet from under his cloak and displayed it.

"It is a lie!" the accused man cried. "It is a lie, and I—"

"It is the truth," the accuser interrupted.

"You will have all the chance needed to disprove it when you are brought to trial. Detective Pearsman," speaking to one of the detectives whom he recognized, "I will deliver this packet to you, and you will find that it is all I claim for it. I have done my work well, and there is your man. Do not allow him to escape you. But, then, no need for me to say this to you."

The bride, Frances Cantril, had dropped upon a chair, where she assumed a pretended faint.

Some of the women present advanced toward her, but Genteel John waved them back. He had more to say to them all.

He had tossed the packet to the detective, who had caught it, and who had advanced close enough to the accused man to prevent his escape should he make such an attempt.

"I spoke of a personal vengeance that led me to postpone this exposure till now," the black rider went on. "I will now make plain what that was, and the object of it. You all remember the burning of the hotel at Denver, in which my bride lost her life. I entered the burning building to find her; I did find her, in the midst of the heat, smoke and flames; I bade her get upon my shoulders so that I could have free use of hands and arms as I carried her out; I stooped to receive her; at that moment this woman—this monster, unknown to me, pushed her back and took her place, and so it came that I carried her out instead of my poor wife."

A sob choked him for an instant, but he quickly resumed:

"I supposed it was my wife till I saw her face after I had escaped with her, when, finding it was not, I would have rushed back to certain death for her sake had I been allowed to do so. But, I was held, and the building fell and my bride was buried beneath the ruins. And this woman is, in the sight of Heaven, *her murderer*! Can you wonder that I have taken this chance for a tithe of revenge, slight and inadequate though it is? I thought I would allow her to wed this man upon whom she was expending all her arts. You have gained your ambition, Frances Cantril—I know you can hear me, for your faint is only a sham; and I wish you joy. This in some measure repays you for what you have done; in some

measure satisfies the revenge I made oath to take."

The masked man looked around the room, as if now debating his manner of escape.

"One word more, to you, detectives and reporters," he said. "I have no desire to do any of you harm, and so I warn you not to attempt to detain me when I am ready to depart. I am innocent of the crime for which the law seeks my life, for which it would ere this have hanged me but for my escape, and I am going to fight for life and freedom until I am able to prove to the world that I did not kill Murdock Kinross. And another word to my foes, to those whose false testimony at my trial would have sent me to the gallows: I have marked you, and my vengeance shall yet fall upon you. There is no escape; nothing but death can place you beyond my reach. For two purposes only do I live; to prove my innocence and to wreak vengeance upon those who dragged me down."

Millfield had been in the room, but no sooner had the black rider announced who he was than that gentleman beat a hasty retreat through the nearest window.

No desire had he to face this man whom he had so irreparably wronged.

But it was not for personal safety alone that he had hastened out. He meant to capture the escaped convict if possible.

No sooner out than he gathered men around him, to whom he made known his plan, and speedily every door and window of the room was guarded, the men having orders to capture the outlaw dead or alive.

This was no more than might have been expected, however, and it would have shown shortsightedness on the part of Genteel John had he not come prepared for just that emergency. So he had come, one reason for his riding his horse into the room in the manner described.

Mounted, he had every advantage, and his horse was one to be trusted in any emergency.

Having ended what he had to say, the masked rider took up the rein in his left hand, while with his right he presented his revolver in a threatening manner at the crowd.

"Let no man try to stop me," he warned. "Let me depart in peace, and all will be well. Try to detain me, and there may be trouble. I know the reward that is upon my head is a temptation to you, but the reward is not worth the risk. Now I am going."

He started forward as leisurely as he had come into the room.

For a moment no one attempted to hinder him, but when he reached the doorway four men suddenly blocked his path, each with a revolver presented.

"Stop!" was the command. "Another step, John Heathcote, and you are a dead man!"

"Out of my way," was the stern order, "or there may be more dead men than one. I am a desperate man, one not to be trifled with."

He had not paused, and now his horse was upon the four.

The women who had remained in the room were screaming, and the excitement was great.

"Take him!" commanded a voice without. "Take him! Do not let him escape! Kill him, or you will lose him!"

The four had stepped back, their revolvers presented straight at the black rider's breast, and once more they commanded him to halt and surrender.

As well might they have spoken commands to the free winds of Heaven.

"Fire!" ordered the man in the background, and it was the voice of Osmond Millfield. "Fire!"

The four revolvers spoke at once, the bullets undoubtedly went true to the mark, but their effect was naught.

With an imprecation of anger, the detective outlaw urged forward his horse at a bound, and with clubbed weapon he knocked the amazed men right and left out of his way.

The heavy hoofs thundered once or twice in the hall, once only on the piazza as the noble steed made a leap to the street, and with a laugh of defiance the proscribed man dashed away up the valley, while revolvers barked spitefully behind him.

Genteel John was gone.

What can be said of the scene that followed?

To describe it in detail were utterly impossible, nor is it necessary.

About the time when all attention was being drawn to Genteel John and the men who tried to arrest him, the accused Robert Woonstead tried to make his escape by a rear door.

Detective Pearsman had an eye upon him, however, and he had not taken three steps before a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder and he was brought to a halt with the cold tube of a revolver pressed under his ear. He was willing to stop, under the pressing circumstances.

Pearsman called to an assistant, who put handcuffs upon the fellow, and he was rendered helpless.

When the four in the hall who had been knocked over so ingloriously had regained their feet, and Osmond Millfield had somewhat quieted down, for he had made a great ado over the escape, then the proofs Genteel John had given Detective Pearsman were looked into.

They were proofs positive, and the prisoner had no loophole for escape. He could not deny his identity, and the proof that he was the man who had robbed the bank could not be gainsayed. The detective outlaw had done his work exceedingly well, and one mystery had now been cleared up. Genteel John was innocent of that one crime, at any rate. But the other—For that he was condemned to die!

CHAPTER IX.

A NEW PHASE OF THE MATTER.

THE events of that night were not soon to be forgotten.

Never to be forgotten, perhaps, at Daisy Drift, and certainly never by the persons who had been most conspicuous.

The reporters spent the rest of the night in writing descriptive articles of the sensational order for their papers, while the detectives talked the situation over among themselves, explaining to one another why they had made no effort to arrest Genteel John.

In some of them it was particularly galling that he had escaped, after they had spent so long a time waiting at Daisy Drift, where they believed he would come sooner or later for the purpose of seeing Colonel Lyndon. And now that he had come and was gone, again; they were accordingly sad.

Somehow some of them felt that they were out of pocket just five thousand dollars, the amount of the reward that was upon the outlaw's head.

The "outlaw" he may be called, since he was under ban, a price upon his head and a noose awaiting him in case he should be caught; outlaw, though innocent of any crime save that of fighting for his life.

There was one among the detectives, however, who had been converted by the events of that night, and that one was Detective Pearsman. He declared openly his belief that Genteel John was innocent of the murder, and pledged himself to do all in his power to help him to establish his innocence.

The prisoner—the bank-robber—was taken to Denver; where the proofs in the hands of Pearsman convicted him.

There was no escape, and everybody had to acknowledge the superior detective skill which Genteel John had shown in weaving the chain around him, hampered as he had been.

The rascal was sent to prison for a long term of years, and about two-thirds of his stolen riches was restored to the bank. While as for Frances Cantril, she disappeared from sight, together with her mother, both evidently anxious to hide their heads after the disgrace they had met.

Some time went by.

The next sensation was something entirely unlooked for.

The daily stage between the nearest railroad point and Daisy Drift was held up one afternoon and robbed.

It had a large amount of money aboard at the time, money sent to pay off the mine employees, and that was the object of the robbery. Nothing else was taken or asked for.

But, what made the sensation all the

greater, the robber was declared to have been Genteel John.

Men were aboard who had seen him on the occasion of his visit to the camp on that memorable night, and they declared it was the same horse and rider again.

More than that, the robber had revealed his identity, declaring himself to be the detective outlaw, Genteel John. And this was the report given by all who were aboard the stage at the time.

"Being proscribed and hounded," they quoted the robber as having said, "I am bound to have the name as well as the game. The law has made me an outlaw, and an outlaw I will be in fact. Let them take me if they can. It is my hand against every man's hand now."

And so the news was spread.

Colonel Mark Lyndon and his wife were seated together in their comfortable cottage parlor one evening, where they were usually to be found at that hour.

Both were sad and downcast, as they had been ever since cruel Fate had robbed them of their favorite child in so horrible a manner, and their conversation was concerning that trying time and the events which had followed.

"I am glad you do not believe it," Mrs. Lyndon remarked.

"Believe it!" cried the colonel. "I would not believe it if John were to tell me so himself."

"But, how is it to be accounted for? There is no doubting the fact that the stage was stopped and the money taken, and we cannot doubt the testimony of those who were aboard respecting the rest."

"That is all right; but it was not John Heathcote. As to accounting for it, I don't. I simply say I do not understand it."

"Nor do I; though, like you, I am sure it was not John."

"He has enemies, men who have good reason to fear him, now, and who would do anything to remove him from their path."

"You mean Millfield, for one."

"Yes."

"How I detest the wretch!"

"And well you may, too. This may be his doings."

"In what way do you mean?"

"In this way! The robber was certainly not Genteel John, so of course it was some one playing the role for a purpose. And that purpose, to cast more odium upon John's name."

"I see it, I see it! They would trample him in the mire, now that they have got him down. They will suffer yet, I feel it—I know it! But, how strange that John has never been near us since he escaped from the custody of the officers! Seems to me he might venture."

"I have given you my views regarding that. He knows that our house must be under watch of the detectives, who believe that sooner or later he will come here, and who are ready to take him at a moment's notice. The wait is trying their patience severely, but there are at least two here that I know of."

"And of course John must be aware of their movements."

"He undoubtedly is. See the manner in which he worked up that robbery case and cleared his name of that charge. He was rubbing elbows all the time with the very men who were looking for him most eagerly."

"But how will he ever clear himself of the other crime? Of the terrible charge of murder that hangs over his head?"

"He will do it, if no harm comes to him. I am sure he will do it; he is just that sort of man. But how—you ask me too much. We must wait and see how."

There came a ring at the bell, or gong, at the cottage front door.

A servant responded, and soon appeared to announce a stranger.

"Show him in," directed Colonel Lyndon.

An aged man entered the room. He had white hair and beard, was bent with years, and supported himself with a stout cane.

"Do I address Colonel Mark Lyndon?" he inquired, on entering.

"You do, sir," was the response. "Whom have I the honor of receiving?"

"I am Henry Yardley, sir, from Denver. I am here regarding that matter of insurance you are waiting to hear about."

While he spoke the old man had taken the chair that had been proffered, and laid his hat beside him on the floor.

"Why, sir, I know nothing about any matter of insurance," said the colonel, in a tone of much surprise.

The servant had withdrawn, now, and her steps had ceased to be heard in the hall.

"Perhaps you do not," the old man observed, in a lower tone. "That remark was intended for other ears."

The voice was changed, now, and both the colonel and Mrs. Lyndon looked at the stranger eagerly.

"Are you John?" the colonel demanded.

"Yes, I am John," was acknowledged.

"But, do not let your excitement betray me. I have risked much in coming here. Keep perfectly calm and let us talk quietly in low tones."

"Yes, yes; but, where have you been? Where do you keep yourself? Tell us all about yourself, John."

"There is much to tell, Colonel Lyndon, more than can be told in one brief interview such as this must of necessity be. I will answer your question. I have been stopping at the hotel for several days now."

"At the hotel? At the hotel here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good heavens! Are you not aware that men are here eager to take you?"

"Of course I am, and that is the reason I have cautioned you to silence, or rather quietness, now."

"And who are you at the hotel?"

"You have heard of Fenton Doyle, the sport?"

"Heard of him! As if his name isn't well known here."

"Well, such is the role I am assuming for the present—or have been playing, at any rate, for I am done with it now. I am here for a purpose, you may be sure of that."

"You have been intimate with Millfield and his set of followers."

"Exactly; and for a purpose. My point has been gained, and Fenton Doyle is to turn up missing to-morrow morning. Before leaving the place I thought it best to come and see you once, at all risks. I want to see if you still believe me innocent."

"We do, my boy; we do, we do."

"And this stage-robbery business has found no credence in your mind?"

"Not so far as you are concerned. We know you are innocent of that. Of course we know the robbery was genuine enough."

"I am glad of that. The affair was so well managed that I was afraid you might mistrust me. It was not I, but another who is taking up my name with a purpose. I wanted you to know this from my own lips."

"It was not necessary; we could not doubt you."

"I am glad of that. And now, for the first time, I have a chance to thank you for the manner in which you helped me out of the jail, Colonel Lyndon. It was well done, and—"

"Heavens! boy, have you not heard the truth of that?"

"I know that you sent a woman to help me out—"

"No, we never did."

"What?"

"I say we never did. We had nothing to do with your escape."

"Is it possible! No, I had not heard anything of this; never inquired into it, for I supposed it was your work, somehow."

"No; we had not begun to act yet, or had only just begun, upon a plan entirely different from that one. When you escaped, though, of course there was no need for action on our part."

"It is strange, strange. Who was that woman, I wonder?"

"The lawyer, the detective and I talked it over, and the detective came to the conclusion that she was one who had something to do with the crime, and who helped you out so that you might not suffer innocently."

"That was the idea that was just shaping itself in my mind. It must be so, and I have one more slight clue to work upon. Perhaps it was a woman who killed my

adored step-father. But, I am handicapped now, for if she took the risk of saving my life, I have not the heart to drag her to justice."

CHAPTER X.

"MANY A SLIP," ETC.

THERE was silence for some moments after that.

All three were considering the situation from that point of view. That there was some justice in Genteel John's view of it could not be denied.

Supposing that woman to have been the slayer of Murdock Kinross, unwilling that an innocent person should suffer for her crime she had taken upon herself the risk of setting him free.

And now, for him to hunt her down and drag her to justice, for the purpose of establishing his own innocence before the world—it seemed base selfishness. His life was out of danger, so long as he could keep out of the hands of the officers, and he owed it to that woman.

"There is something in that, I agree with you," the colonel presently spoke, "but you at least owe it to yourself to clear your name."

"And that is the only object I have in the matter, Colonel Lyndon," was the response. "It certainly would not be for any love I had for Murdock Kinross that I carried on the search."

"I admit that; but this woman may not have been the guilty one, and in any event you should not stop until you had satisfied yourself upon these points. You will never be satisfied until you have solved the mystery, even though you never reveal the matter to the public."

"Oh! I have no idea of stopping in my task. And then, Heaven forgive me for my selfishness! the mystery of the fire—the fire in which poor Nydia lost her life! If my suspicion proves true, that the one who killed Kinross was the one who set the fire, I would drag him, or her, to justice, even though my life had been saved twice over."

Mrs. Lyndon was in tears now at the mention of her child's terrible fate, and the colonel had to bite his lips.

"It would be right, it would be right," the colonel said hoarsely.

"Besides, I should have escaped anyhow, though of course the woman could know nothing about that. But, I am determined to sift the thing to the bottom, and when I have learned the truth, then I can use my discretion about what action to take in the case."

"And where are you going now?" asked Mrs. Lyndon.

"I am not going far, be sure of that," was the reply.

"You prefer not to disclose your plans."

"Yes, since walls are said to have ears, and I would not have them become known."

"Very well, you are no doubt right."

"And, Mrs. Lyndon, a word about one of your servants, the one who opened the door to me. She is playing into the hands of the detectives who are watching this cottage."

"You cannot mean it!"

"Were it not so, I would not make the charge, as you must know. I knew full well the risk I was running in coming here, but I accepted it. I wanted to assure you in person of my innocence in the matter of the stage robbery—"

"It was not necessary."

"So I am well pleased to know. And now I will remain no longer, for I have no doubt but that the information that there is a stranger here has been carried to the detectives, and they may be here sooner than I think. Poor fellows! they are selfishly blind in the matter. Would that more of them were like Pearsman."

"Yes, would that they were, indeed."

"Well, I will not delay another minute, for I would not have trouble with the officers in your house, my best and dearest of friends. God speed the day when I may be able to reward your confidence in me with full and satisfactory proof that I am as innocent as I claim to be, and—"

The door opened just at that point, and two men stepped into the room.

Their approach had not been heard, and their coming was a surprise. They were two detectives.

Each had a weapon in hand, which was aimed straight at the disguised man's breast and one displayed also a pair of handcuffs.

Genteel John did not stir, but both the colonel and Mrs. Lyndon sprung to their feet, the latter with a scream, and springing forward she placed herself between the detectives and the hunted man, crying:

"No, no! You must not take him—you shall not take him! We will not give him up—do you hear? We will not give him up!"

The detective smiled.

"Thank you, madam," said one; "you have given us just the proof we wanted. John Heathcote, you are our prisoner. If you resist we have full authority to shoot you down like a dog."

Poor Mrs. Lyndon, seeing what she had done in her excitement, sunk down overcome.

Genteel John rose to his feet, now, without the least haste or excitement in his movements, and said:

"You might at least have spared this lady such a shock. Could you not have awaited my coming out, since the girl was prompt to inform you of my presence here?"

"What know you of that?" was demanded.

"I know all about it, and your presence is no surprise to me; but I did not think you would intrude into a gentleman's house unannounced, as you have. But, then, all men are not gentlemen."

"Our business has no use for etiquette," snarled the elder of the two, somewhat flushed.

"As is very evidently the case," was the cool, irritating rejoinder.

"Do you surrender, Sir Convict?"

"I don't see what else there is for me to do, under the circumstances," was the easy reply. "I would not have you kill me here."

"No, no," sobbed Mrs. Lyndon, "it must not be, it must not be! He is innocent, gentlemen; we know he is innocent. Spare him, and let him work out the mystery as he has sworn to do."

"And meanwhile rob stages and kill folks, eh? I guess not. This is unpleasant business, madam, and we regret exceedingly that you should be a witness to it, but business is business with us. Up with your hands, John Heathcote."

"With pleasure," was the easy response, and his hands were raised.

"You infernal scamps!" now exploded Colonel Lyndon. "What do you mean by coming into my house without my permission? Get out of here, both of you, and as soon as you can!"

The colonel had been almost choking from the very first intrusion, and it had taken him all this time to find some vent for his feelings.

"Just one moment, Colonel Lyndon, and we will retire. We must have our prisoner, however. We have waited a good many weary weeks for this chance, and we cannot allow it to slip."

"Well, please cut short the suspense, then, and have it done with," urged Genteel John. "Every moment but adds to the distress of this lady, as you must be able to see, if you can see anything."

His tone was irritating, his words galling. He showed not the least excitement, not the least fear, not the least degree of any emotion whatever. He was as cool as it is possible for man to be.

The elder of the brace of detectives had now stepped nearer, keeping his revolver presented point blank at the disguised man's heart, and he now ordered the other to "clap on the darbies."

Forward stepped the younger, the handcuffs ready, a look of keen exultation upon his face.

Genteel John allowed him to come quite near, holding out his wrists as if in perfect submission to what seemed the inevitable.

At the moment when the man would have applied the bracelets, however, one of the detective outlaw's iron-like hands seized his sleeve and a sudden jerk sent him into a corner headlong.

At the same moment the weapon of the other detective spoke.

He had been looking for anything of this

sort that might be attempted, and was quick to fire.

But, as on the other occasion, the bullets seemed powerless, and before he could fire again Genteel John's fist took him squarely between the eyes and he went over like a ten-pin.

Without the delay of another second, then, the outlaw detective sprung to the door and out, but on the stoop he was confronted by a dozen men, all armed.

His arms shot out with lightning quickness, one right and the other left, and the stoop was cleared, while he sprung to the ground and ran, clearing the fence at a bound, and with a yell of defiance was off up the valley.

Bullets whistled after him, as before, but he only laughed at them.

Some men started in pursuit, but two or three warning shots took some of the ardor out of them and they soon fell back.

Once again had the daring convict entered the village, and again had he escaped, laughing defiance to them all.

Great was the chagrin of the defeated detectives, and many the reasons given for their defeat.

Next morning the outlaw's disguise was found some distance up the valley, but those who attempted to follow his trail were baffled. It was useless to try to find his secret retreat, if he had one.

And on that morning, too, the camp received a double surprise.

During the night the Wells-Fargo Express office had been robbed, the safe having been opened as skillfully as had that of the Bank at Denver, and all the contents of any value taken.

That was not all.

On the door of the safe was this notice:

"NOTICE.

"You have given me the name, and I will have the game as well. I am in for it anyhow, if you can catch me, so here's to a short life and a merry one. Defiantly yours,

"GENTEEL JOHN."

Such was the double surprise; the empty safe and that defiant note from the robber.

If there had been any doubt before that Genteel John and the man who had robbed the stage were not one and the same, it was settled now.

There were barely half a dozen all told who believed him innocent after this, and one of the detectives had taken pains to point out that the handwriting was unmistakably that of the escaped murderer.

Besides, had he not been in the camp on that night? Had he not attempted the lives of the men who had tried to take him? He was a desperate man, and must be dealt with as such. In a little time the reward offered for his capture was doubled, and the business of hunting him down was taken up with renewed interest and vigor. He must needs be wary indeed to elude the hounds who were on the track so relentlessly.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MOST DARING ON RECORD.

THE robbery of the Wells-Fargo office brought new blood into the man-hunt, as might be expected.

Some of the best detectives of the company were put upon the case, and their instructions were definite. They were to capture John Heathcote at all hazards, regardless of everything.

That he was the robber the company held no doubt.

Those who believed him innocent of the murder were only a very few, and in the case of the Lyndons it was set down to the fact that the man had married into the family and they must bear something of the burden of disgrace.

The proof against the man had been too positive and overwhelming. The evidence of such a man as Osmond Millfield was enough without anything more. His integrity was not to be doubted for a moment. Then, too, the outlaw had acknowledged himself as the robber.

Backing the acknowledgment, as has been shown, was the fact that the handwriting, as shown in the note that had been left with the rifled safe, was his beyond any doubt.

Yes, this Genteel John, as he had been

called, was the robber, they held no doubt upon that score, and he was the man they wanted.

The Express Company had posted an additional reward of two thousand dollars, so, all together, the price upon the hunted man's head was twelve thousand dollars.

No wonder many a man was eager to take him.

The desire was one thing, however; the realization of it quite another, as they were to learn.

Presently came another good and sufficient cause for a renewal of interest, if not indeed of excitement in the matter.

The bank robber, Radcliffe Royce, *alias* Robert Woonstead, had escaped from prison.

How he had escaped was a mystery to the prison officials.

As one newspaper put it, in something of alleged humorous phrase, "In the evening he was; in the morning he was not."

And that, explained more fully, meant that he had escaped during the night. In the morning the door of his cell was found open, and he was gone.

So far as could be noted every other door and window was secure, but thorough search proved only too well that the institution had one inmate less than it had had the night before.

A rigid investigation was made, but to no purpose.

Employees simply knew nothing about the matter, further than the apparent fact, and there was no proof against any of them.

Those immediately responsible were dismissed, but that did not solve the mystery nor did it restore the prisoner to the vacant cell. Radcliffe Royce was numbered among the missing.

In this case a reward was offered, to the amount of five hundred dollars as a starter, and detectives gave their attention to it.

The sheriff and his deputies took a hand in the hunt, but no trace of the missing prisoner was to be found. He had disappeared utterly, as utterly as had John Heathcote at the time of his escape.

Those detectives who were most capable, and who investigated most closely, arrived at a conclusion which, while it did not throw a great deal of light upon the affair, did shed a little illumination upon it. They set it down as a case on a parallel with the escape of Genteel John.

There was a woman in the case!

It was brought out that two days previous to his escape the bank robber had had a woman visitor.

Visitors were allowed there only at certain hours upon certain days, and the woman having complied with all the rules and regulations, had been admitted.

Her name was given, and she declared herself to be an aunt of the prisoner, which was admitted by the prisoner himself at the time. There had been nothing out of order about the matter.

Nothing was thought of it until the prisoner turned up missing, and not even then till the detectives began to probe into the affair.

The woman had come to the prison veiled, and only a few had seen her face at all.

These were unable to describe her to any effect.

So stood the case.

This case, however, was only a trifling one as compared with the larger, the matter of hunting down Genteel John and bringing him to justice.

The latter was as much greater, in the minds of all who were interested in it, as the reward of twelve thousand dollars was greater than the reward of five hundred. It received attention in proportion.

The Job's Find Mine at Daisy Drift made a shipment of its output of bullion every other month.

These shipments were made by the Wells-Fargo, and the company was responsible for the safe delivery of the treasure at its place of destination.

The value of each shipment was no trifling sum, for the mine was a rich one and was run upon a paying basis, with its own mill on the ground to save all needless expense for transportation.

One forenoon the shipment set out from the camp in the usual manner.

A regular service wagon was used, having

a safe securely bolted upon an iron frame, and in that safe the bullion was locked.

Two men with rifles and other weapons rode on top of the safe, while the driver held the seat in front and managed the ribbons. Then there was another man, as extra, who rode beside the driver.

Little danger that road-agents would interfere with such an equipage as that, it was thought.

Yet that very thing was destined to happen on this occasion, nevertheless.

And not only so, but successfully.

There was one part of the trail between the village camp and the railroad which was regarded as especially dangerous.

Here everything was favorable for a successful raid upon a stage, and it had been just here that the stage had been held up and robbed by Genteel John—as the robber had declared himself to be, and so most men believed.

At this point on their journey the men in charge of the treasure wagon were alert and vigilant. They held their rifles ready for use at an instant's notice, and would undoubtedly have made things lively for any number of robbers who might venture to stop them there.

None were encountered, however, and the dangerous locality having been laid safely behind, the men were less watchful.

Finally came a stretch of almost level, open country, and here the rifles were laid down and the messengers brought out their pipes for a quiet smoke.

Robbers were out of the question now. In fact, there had been little fear of meeting them at all, for what road-agent would dare to attack such a veritable fort on wheels?

The team was jogging along at any easy gait, the driver and his companion were sitting with their elbows upon their knees, telling yarns, and the messengers behind were smoking their pipes in peace, when of a sudden and without the least warning something happened.

The wheels of the wagon dropped into the ground to the hubs, and the whole concern was brought to a stop with a suddenness that sent every man of them toppling over, and there they were.

The neatest kind of a trap had been laid, and they had fallen into it, not through their own fault, but because it was something unique, and they had no thought of anything of the sort.

And there came at the same moment the ringing order.

"Hands up, every man of you, or bite lead!"

The horses, badly frightened, were rearing and plunging madly, and the driver and his companion, having fallen right under their heels, were faring badly.

One had been stepped on, and the other had received a kick, so that both were disabled and practically out of the fight. The messengers, however, showed fight at once, regardless of all.

As soon as they could recover themselves, their revolvers were out and they began popping away.

"Hands up!" came the order once more.

"Hands up, or you die!"

The order was not heeded.

These messengers were brave men, and their business was to defend the treasure that had been intrusted to their care, even with their very lives.

Each sprung to cover as quickly as possible, and then followed a rapid exchange of shots on both sides that lasted for some seconds. But the result was fatal to the defenders.

First one went down, then the other, and the treasure was at the mercy of the daring thieves.

And who were they?

No sooner had the wagon been brought to a stop than half a dozen men had leaped into sight from behind banks of earth where they had been in hiding.

Their hiding-place being covered with grass and bushes, and they having been lying at full length, their presence had not been suspected until they leaped up with their thrilling shout.

And the foremost of them, the one evidently the leader, or captain, was a man clad all in black, wearing a black mask over his face and having a cape of the same funeral

hue hanging from his shoulders. He was recognized instantly. It was no other than the daring outlaw, Genteel John.

The two messengers having been killed, the driver and the extra were ready to surrender, more than half disabled as they already were.

They were ordered to stand aside, which, however, one was unable to do owing to a broken leg, so he was dragged out of the way; and then while one man stood guard over them the others gave their attention to the safe.

The man in black searched the messengers for a key, but none was to be found upon them.

Neither of them had a key to the safe. It had been locked at the point of starting, and was not to be opened by any person until it reached its destination.

This, however, did not balk the desperate fellows.

The horses were unhitched from the wagon and led some distance away, the driver and his companion were taken further back, and powder was brought into play to gain the desired object.

There was an explosion that wrecked the wagon, tore the safe loose from it and deposited it on the ground badly cracked, and the rest of the work was easy. More powder was applied, and this time the safe was split asunder and its golden treasure poured out upon the ground.

The most daring robbery on record, for that section, had been committed, and Genteel John was the robber. Worse, two lives had been taken, and the blood of the slain men was upon his head.

CHAPTER XII.

UNDER A REIGN OF TERROR.

A shout went up as the yellow wealth poured out of the safe, and those of the band who were disengaged leaped forward to gather it up.

Each man had a leathern pouch, which had the look of having been made purposely for such work as this, and each began to fill his own with eager haste, no attempt at equal division being made.

The other two were allowed the same privilege, presently, and they made a clean gathering up of what the first harvesters had left. The six leather bags were by no means filled, but the treasure being heavy, each had about all he could conveniently handle.

The chief of the band next addressed the driver.

"You hardly expected a surprise like this, did you?" he remarked.

"Hardly," was the response, "You'll know what to expect, though, if they ever get you to rights."

"Ha, ha! They have been trying it good while, and they don't seem to be any nearer to it than they were at first. I hold the best hand, my man."

"You certainly do this deal. If you are done, I s'pose you'll low me to gather up what's left and go back to camp. You've done a bad business, and have killed two mighty good fellows."

"It was their own fault. Yes, you may gather up the wreck and the dead men and go back and tell what's happened. Give them the compliments of Genteel John, and tell them they'll hear from us again. I've got a good band around me now, and we are going to make things hum."

With that, the rascal gave a signal to his men and all made off down through a shallow gully to the left, leaving the driver and his helpless companion to get out of their dilemma as best they might.

The poor fellow set to work, and finally had extricated and patched up the wrecked wagon, when, putting the dead man aboard and helping his companion to a place, he set out upon the return to the village camp.

He had first patched up the road where the death-trap had been laid, so that no other vehicle might come to grief in the holes.

The excitement which prevailed when he drove into Daisy Drift exceeded all bounds.

The place went fairly wild about the heinous affair.

Immediately a force of men was organized, thoroughly equipped, and sent out to trail the murderer and his cut-throat followers to their lair.

A competent man was at the head of the

band, a plainsman who knew thoroughly what was required and how to conduct the hunt, and the driver of the treasure-wagon accompanied him.

The trail was taken up at the point where the crime had been done, and was followed easily enough for a distance of three miles.

Then it abruptly ended on the bank of a river, and was lost. The fellows had waded into the river, and the water being deep and rapid, nothing further could be discovered.

But, the matter was not given up.

The next day was devoted to exploring the banks of the river up and down, on both sides, for miles.

It was useless. The trail was lost, utterly, and it was not recovered. It ended there on the bank of the river, and there the hounds of the law were baffled.

The reward offered by the Express Company was increased at once, and a most determined effort was made to take the outlaws. Fifteen thousand dollars was the sum total offered for the capture of Genteel John, dead or alive.

A week after that terrible event the daily stage brought to Daisy Drift some persons who are to figure in our romance.

It brought strangers every day, or nearly so, and new faces drew but little attention.

One of these persons was a woman, one who was on the down-hill of life's journey.

She wore the curls affected by many old ladies, and a pair of gold-bowed glasses were constantly seen upon her nose.

At the hotel, where she took one of the best rooms to be had, she registered as Mrs. Rainhard, from Chicago. She was entirely alone and had little baggage.

Another who had come by the same stage was unmistakably an Englishman.

He proved it in his manner, in his speech, and in his dress. Everything about him smacked of her Majesty's little island.

His name upon the register stood forth as E. Garnet Poke, of London. He was quiet, unassuming, by no means boastful, yet it was evident that he possessed an abundance of the "wherewith."

This man's baggage consisted of a battered leather trunk which was pasted and plastered all over with the checks and labels attesting much foreign travel, and which on one end was stamped with the initials E. G. P. Proof enough that Mr. Poke was just what he claimed to be.

And these two, Mrs. Rainhard and Mr. Poke, seemed to have no other object in view at Daisy Drift than rest and ease for a season.

They spent much of their time on the piazza of the hotel, and after awhile picked up acquaintance.

About this time came another who was not a stranger, yet one who, by her reappearance, created quite a stir, and this was—Frances Cantril.

Her divorce from the bank-robber had been announced in the Denver papers, a divorce which she had had no trouble in procuring, and she braved it to reappear upon the scene of her innocent misstep.

As to the charge made against her by the notorious outlaw, that she had sent his bride to her death in order to save her own life by usurping her place, that she had declared to be utterly false. She stuck to her former statement regarding the affair, as given further back.

Her mother did not accompany her.

She had, so the daughter explained, returned East for the purpose of attending to some business there. Later in the season she would join her, Frances, at Daisy Drift.

She had no flowery time of it, at first, at the hotel, where she had lost caste, for none of her former friends seemed to care to renew the acquaintance they had with her. Gradually, however, she regained some footing so that life was a little more bearable.

By this time the Englishman, E. Garnet Poke, had become quite a favorite with the ladies at the hotel, and Frances worked herself in for a share of his attentions.

He was a capital story-teller and his company was much sought after, and no afternoon gathering on the piazza was complete without him.

And, after a time, it began to be rumored that Frances Cantril was making another conquest.

Some weeks had slipped by again, as will be inferred.

During that time nothing had been heard of Genteel John and his band, and the detectives were getting a little weary.

The woods was full of them, to use that well-known phrase; regular, private, amateur, Government and what-not, each and every one them willing—ay, thirsting—to earn fame and fortune in the case.

It was hardly believed that the outlaw would ever be heard of again in that section.

For him to show his head now would be the height of folly, for he could not possibly escape if once sighted.

Undoubtedly he had put distance between himself and the scene of his crimes, after the daring Express robbery, and would never be heard of again.

With plenty of wealth, he could begin life anew in another land, with all the chances in favor of his living to a ripe old age, unless he continued on in his evil career there, in which case he would probably sooner or later come to grief.

Such ideas were beginning to take root in many minds when suddenly one morning Daisy Drift awoke to the fact that another visitation had been made.

The hotel had been robbed!

And, as it appeared upon investigation, particular attention had been paid to the detectives stopping there.

Not one of them but had lost money, watch, or something, and in each room was found a note purporting to be from the outlaw, extending his best compliments and wishing them all success in taking him.

Here was a sensation!

But that was not all—not the half of it.

It was discovered that the Express office had again been visited, in spite of the fact that now a night watchman was there with orders to give the alarm at the slightest suspicion.

No such alarm had been given, yet when those in charge of the office went there on this morning, a little time after the robbery at the hotel had been discovered, the watchman was found bound and gagged and the safe door wide open.

And even that was not the worst of it; the watchman was not only bound and gagged, but dead.

A huge knife had been buried to the hilt in his breast.

This time there was no note saying that it had been the work of Genteel John, as on the other occasion, but, then, it was not necessary.

The very fact that Genteel John had been there, as the other work at the hotel proved, was enough. Here was another crime charged to him. Never in the history of that section, had there been such a bloodthirsty demon at large.

Osmond Millfield called a meeting to express the public indignation, and for the purpose, if possible, of finding some means to unearth the outlaw.

A recent election, by the way, had made Millfield mayor of the town, and he was making a stir in every direction possible.

The meeting was held, and the mayor made a stirring speech, urging the people to action.

They must arm, he declared, and form themselves into a regular committee of Vigilantes and stand ready to cope with the outlaws at a moment's notice.

There was hardly anything in this, since there had already been formed such a committee, under the direction of Colonel Lyndon, for the purpose of hunting down the road-agent and his desperadoes.

And, as these had done all they could it did not seem likely that a larger force could do more.

Another thing proposed was to have a police force organized at once to protect the camp against further depredations of the kind.

This found favor, and was acted upon, twenty men being selected for night duty, their service to begin that very night. It was not believed, however, that the robber would dare to come again.

The village was, practically, under a reign of terror. Many of the summer boarders declared their intention of getting away with all haste, but the danger of meeting the robbers on the road deterred them. After a few days, however, the excitement somewhat subsided.

CHAPTER XIII.

SOME NEW ARRIVALS.

Nothing more had been seen or heard of the outlaw, and public confidence was in a measure restored.

Only a few had kept their word and gone away, and for those who remained the police and the Vigilantes promised full and ample protection.

The regular stages now carried two armed guards, one riding on each side of the driver, and it was not thought that the outlaw band would again interfere with the Jehu and his "hearse."

Mrs. Rainhard, the old lady from Chicago, was showing considerable of interest in the stages.

She was expecting her son, who was not in the best of health, and the excitement of a meeting with the desperate men might prove too much for him.

On hand regularly to meet every stage, she showed keener disappointment each time till finally the expected one at last arrived, and son and mother fell upon each other and embraced.

Those who had heard Mrs. Rainhard's talk about her son, were somewhat disappointed in him.

She had led them to expect to see a sickly-looking man.

Instead, Johnston Rainhard was quite hearty, and but for his paleness, would have been pronounced as healthy a man as the camp could show.

But, this was nothing mysterious.

He had been traveling, and his health had improved wonderfully.

In fact, at sight of him Mrs. Rainhard uttered some joyous remarks concerning his improved appearance.

And she hoped, by finishing the summer there there in "Colorado," to take her son home in the fall in perfect health. Everything indicated that her hope would be realized.

Johnston Rainhard was a man of thirty or so.

He was of medium height and good proportions, and his hands, soft and white like a woman's, showed that he was unused to hard work.

He was well but plainly dressed, carried a cane all the time, and usually had his broad hat pulled low over his brow. He had a short, full beard trimmed close, and a long mustache.

The same stage brought a visitor to Colonel Lyndon.

It was a man of middle age, a portly gentleman with a fair and ruddy face, the ideal of a hearty and prosperous banker or merchant.

As soon as he alighted from the stage he inquired for the colonel's residence, and it being pointed out to him, made his way in that direction without any further delay.

He was a stranger at Daisy Drift.

And being a stranger, he immediately fell under suspicion; as, in fact, did Rainhard, too.

Since Mrs. Rainhard was known, however, having been there some time, and as she had been openly looking for her son, the suspicion in his direction was less.

The other party had come unexpected and unannounced, and his inquiring for Colonel Lyndon led the detectives to think it might be Genteel John in disguise, though it required a long stretch of imagination.

Colonel Lyndon's house had been closely watched, and every comer and goer had to pass, whether he knew it or not, a critical examination.

And these detectives were numerous, as has been said.

They were of every kind, and from great to small in points of ability and experience.

The leaders among them, however, could be named upon the fingers of one hand, and that without including the thumb.

First, perhaps, stood Detective Pearsman, of whom mention has been made. After him may be mentioned in order Detective Joyce, of the Express company; Detective Raynold, private; and Detective Playfair, the same.

Pearsman was a Government man.

"What do you think of him?" asked Joyce of Pearsman, when the portly gentleman had obtained the information he desired and had set out.

"You don't suspect him, do you?" Pearsman counter-questioned.

"Do you?"

"No."

"But, he's a stranger, and he's gone to Lyndon's."

"That is all right. If you have ever seen John Heathcote you must know this man is not he."

"But, the fellow is the deuce at disguising."

"He couldn't take on from forty to sixty pounds of flesh at will, do you suppose he could?"

"Ha! that would be rather difficult, wouldn't it. I guess you are right, Pearsman. Still he may be a friend of the outlaw's, and by following him we could get at the other."

"Possibly; but I hardly think so."

"And why?"

"Because, from what we have seen of John Heathcote I take him to be a man who would prefer to go it alone in any and every case."

"I see Raynold and Playfair are looking after him pretty sharp."

"Reason enough for us to remain out of sight, then."

"And let them do the work?"

"Yes; certainly. If they scare up any game, then it will be time enough for us to join in the chase."

"Your head is old and hard, Pearsman."

"You don't give me credit on that account respecting my opinion of Genteel John, all the same."

"Your belief that he is innocent?"

"Exactly."

"How can I? Everything points to his guilt. And now he is not only guilty of one murder, but several."

"And you ignore my idea that he is not the fellow who has been playing the road-agent and robber here? Well, nothing but time will convince you, I suppose."

"I must have proof before I can believe."

"And I hope we'll soon have it."

"What have you made up your mind to do regarding my proposition that we work together on the case?"

"I have come to the conclusion that it would be folly for us to do that. We cannot agree on the leading points, and we should certainly differ on the smaller."

"Perhaps you would not want to share the fifteen thousand."

"There is not that much in it."

"Not that much! What do you mean? That is what the different rewards foot up, isn't it?"

"True; but here again we differ. Part of that is for John Heathcote, and the remainder of it for the rascal who has been doing these later crimes."

Detective Joyce shook his head.

"I see it's of no use," he said. "We'll have to go it alone."

"You might league with Raynold and Playfair, however," Pearsman suggested. "They are of your mind, I see."

"The trouble is I don't want to work with them. They are private men, you know, and are too all-fired big for me. They think they know it all."

"My advice would be, to go it alone."

"I'll have to."

They were about to part when Joyce turned back to ask.

"What about the other man, however?"

"Mrs. Rainhard's son?"

"Yes."

"What do you think about him?"

"You can't argue sixty pounds of extra flesh there."

"Can a man, by thought, add one cubit to his stature?" Pearsman inquired, in argument.

"Then you think this one is too tall? He certainly is no shorter than John Heathcote."

"He is about an inch and a half taller."

"Then your opinion is plain enough. You don't suspect either one of these men."

"I don't suspect either of them of being John Heathcote."

"Ha! Do you mean by that to have me understand that you do suspect them in some other way?"

"I don't mean to have you understand anything about it," was the rejoinder.

"That is all I care to say; that I do not sus-

pect either of them of being the true Genteel John."

"Yet, one of them may be the false."

"I am not prepared to say that. See what Raynold, Playfair and the others make of it all."

At that they parted.

"No," mused Pearsman, "I do not believe either of these is Genteel John. I am sure on that point. I should like to know, however, where he is, so that I might offer my services to him."

Meanwhile the stranger had gone on to the Lyndon cottage.

The colonel, Mrs. Lyndon, and their son Jackson, were seated on the piazza at the time.

As the stranger came near, Colonel Lyndon rose from his chair and went down to the gate to greet him.

"Why, Judson," he cried, "how are you?"

"Alive, colonel, alive," was the very lively response.

They shook hands heartily, and the colonel led him to the piazza and introduced him to his wife and son.

"My old friend, Judson Pathfinder," he presented him.

The man was made at home, and after some usual first talk, he said to the colonel:

"Well, Mark, I have traveled all the way from Chicago to learn about this mine you have been cracking up to me."

"You will find it all that I have told you, but whether you will care to invest in it now or not, is a question."

"Why?"

"We are being robbed about as fast as we can get the precious stuff ready for the market."

"Robbed? And can't you put a stop to that sort of thing? I'll bet if I had money invested here I would make short work of robbers. Why don't you hire some good detective and hunt them down? Send for the Pinkertons."

CHAPTER XIV.

WARNING SOUNDED.

COLONEL LYNDON smiled in his now sad way.

"I do not think a great deal of your Pinkertons," he made response. "They are fellows trying to live upon the reputation gained by the original of that name."

"All the same, you can't deny but they have done some good work in a good many cases. At all events, I'd try them if I had to deal with robbers who deprived me of my gold."

"Judson," spoke the colonel, "this place is full of detectives, some of them men of no mean reputations."

"Then why don't they make short work of your robber?"

"Because they can't do it."

"Rather because they are not Pinkertons. I should say. I tell you, Mark, when you want the best of anything, send to Chicago for it."

They had already talked about the sad death of the colonel's daughter, and Pathfinder had expressed his sympathy. Colonel Lyndon now reverted to that terrible affair, saying:

"You have read about the trouble of my son-in-law? It has been in the papers."

"Yes, I saw it all."

"He escaped, you know."

"Yes."

"Well, there is now a price upon his head, and these detectives here are after him."

"You tell me you believe in his innocence."

"He is as innocent of that murder, Judson, as you are. John Heathcote is the soul of truth and honor."

"Well, I'm glad he escaped, then, if that is the case. Perhaps we had better not call in the Pinkertons, since they would be pretty likely to hunt him out, and it might fare ill with him."

"Do you think him guilty of—"

"Lord bless you, no! But, without the proof of his innocence, he is better out of the hands of the law."

"Exactly; and it is to prove his innocence that he is working, in secret. I expect to see him come to the front at any time, with

all the proofs necessary to vindicate himself."

"I hope so."

"But, there is a terrible cloud hanging over him, Judson. He was known here as Genteel John, and this outlaw who is robbing us is operating under that name, leaving the impression that he is John Heathcote. And, worst of all, nearly everybody believes it."

"That's bad."

"I should say so. I do not know of half a dozen persons who really and truly believe in his innocence."

"Dark enough, certainly."

"Yes. Here are my wife and I, and Jack; and besides us I can only mention one of the detectives here and a lawyer at Denver."

"Then one of the detectives does believe him innocent, eh?"

"Yes, thoroughly."

"Then he's the man to help your son-in-law, I should say."

"He is willing and eager to do that; but, you see, John is keeping quiet, and no one can say where he is."

"Do you not know?"

"I do not."

The colonel, then, gave his friend all the particulars of the whole affair.

From that they fell to talking again about the mines, and in that lay little of interest to our romance.

It had been a little time after the arrival of the stage when a man entered the private office of the mayor of the town, taking a chair with the ease of a familiar acquaintance.

"Well, what's the word?" Millfield asked.

"Nothing much, yet," answered Sparkers, for he the caller was.

"No signs of the fellow yet, eh?"

"Not unless he's mighty well disguised."

"You noted the man who came by the stage and went over to Lyndon's?"

"Yes."

"Not John, of course."

"Decidedly not. Too big a man for him."

"When the deuce are we going to get hold of him, Joel?"

"I give it up. I thought the detectives would have him long before this, after the work he has been doing."

"And it begins to dawn upon me that he is the best detective of them all. I tell you there is no safety for us while he is above ground."

Mr. Sparkers slightly paled.

"I don't know but you are right," he said.

"Still, he cannot do us much harm when he dare not show himself. He is under the worst kind of disadvantage."

"That's so. But, I wish they could get hold of him. I know I'd breathe a good deal easier. Just now there isn't a single soul in the whole camp that can be suspected."

"You have kept your eyes wide open?"

"Night and day, almost."

"So have I."

"And you can't find any one who needs watching, eh?"

"Not yet. But, I am urging the detectives all I dare, and I hope they will get hold of him soon."

"It is not likely he will appear here again, though, is it?"

"Not as a robber, for the camp is now too strongly guarded; but he must come here if he wants to work against us. He can't fight from a distance and win anything. You are sure you noted well all the passengers?"

"Doubly sure."

"Well, nothing can be done but wait for him to move, and then be ready to fall upon him and hand him over to the hangman."

"That's the proper thing."

"You see, it is hardly possible that he can get proof of his innocence, and so we will have him dead to rights as soon as we can lay hands upon him. No one can say who killed Kinross."

"And the fire did away with every possible clue."

"Exactly. Oh! we are on the winning side yet, Joel, if nothing breaks, and we must see well to it that nothing does break. Curse him! he robbed me of Nydia Lyndon, and I swore I would be even with him."

"But it didn't work as you wanted it to."

"I'm well enough satisfied. I couldn't have planned a better scheme if I had thought a month."

Some one entered just then, and their talk had to be cut short.

The one who came in was a boy who was employed about the office as a sort of handy Jack at everything.

He had been to the post-office to await the sorting of the mail, and now he brought some letters and papers and laid them on the mayor's desk.

Millfield began opening them.

Sparkers lighted a cigar and leaned back in his chair with one of the papers in hand.

Presently he heard an ejaculation from Millfield, and looking up, saw him staring at a letter which he held in hand, his face pale.

"What is it?" Sparkers asked.

"A letter from the very man we were talking about," was the response.

"The deuce! What does he say?"

Before replying to that the mayor told the boy to leave the room so that he might talk with his visitor in private.

"He makes a threat, that is what he says," he then informed.

"Where is he?"

"This is from Denver."

"Well, let's hear it. I guess we can stand it."

"There is not a great deal in it, and here it is:

"PERJURERS MILLFIELD AND SPARKERS:—
"The end is drawing near. You, who swore away my life, look well to yourselves. In such a time as you think not, the blow shall fall. I have taken the first step."
GENTEEL JOHN."

Sparkers grew white to the lips as he listened, and he clutched the arms of his chair.

"That sounds a good deal like grim old business," he said, hoarsely.

"But it's a shot at long range," consoled Millfield. "It may be only a bluff, to worry us."

"Even that is bad enough."

"He gives himself away, though. We know he was in Denver the day this was posted. That gives us all the proof we want that he is not here yet."

"That's so. As the Indians say, never a case so bad that there isn't some good in it for somebody. It remains now for us to watch out sharp for strangers, and to take no chances with them."

"And if we do that we'll nab him sooner or later."

"How about telling the detectives about this message?"

"It won't do."

"Why not?"

"They would want to see it."

"Destroy it, and tell them you did it before you thought."

"That might be done. I could then tell them anything I please. Suppose you step out and find Raynold, or Playfair."

"You don't want any of the others?"

"Certainly not Pearsman, as you know, and I don't put much faith in Joyce."

"All right, I'll hunt them up."

Sparkers went out, leaving the mayor to brood over the matter till his return. It was anything but pleasant food for reflection.

When the tool came back he had the two detectives with him.

"What's this Sparkers tells me?" cried Playfair. "You have heard from that escaped convict?"

"Yes, and he was at Denver only a day ago. I'm sorry I destroyed the note before I thought, or I would show it to you. He threatens another descent upon this camp, and I want you to look out for him."

"And we'll do that," declared Raynold.

"We have already got our eyes on the man who came by the stage to-day and who went at once to Lyndon's. It's not unlikely that he is here on Genteel John's account, and if he is we mean to know it, you bet."

CHAPTER XV.

SUSPICION EASILY DISMISSED.

It was after supper that the English dude, E. Garnet Poke, and Frances Cantril were seated on the piazza of the hotel, talking.

There was a rumor abroad that the woman was trying to make another conquest, and perhaps there was foundation for it. Cer-

tain it was that Frances never tried to avoid Mr. Poke.

"And have you found out yet what the new building is for?" Mr. Poke asked, to bridge a break in the conversation.

"No, Mr. Poke, my curiosity has not yet been gratified," was the charming response.

"Have you been able to learn anything about it?"

"Not a thing, Miss Cantril. I have asked questions enough about it, for your sake, but no one seems to know what it is to be. A good many are of one opinion, however."

"Indeed."

"Yes."

"And what is that opinion?"

"Why, they think it is going to be a gambling palace, as you call them here in America."

"A gambling palace! Surely that will never be allowed here at Daisy; do you imagine it will? That would be terrible."

"I am sure I don't know, Miss Cantril. You Americans are so deucedly odd in everything, don't you know, that a fellow never knows what to expect next. You are so very odd, don't ye know?"

"But, Daisy Drift is becoming so fashionable, Mr. Poke."

"And the more fashionable the more the gambling, I have found it," was the response.

"You cannot mean that."

"Indeed, yes, truly. At Long Branch, and at Saratoga, where I stopped last season; my first summer in America, you know; I was amazed."

"Well, we ladies are not allowed to know much about such things. But, to think that we are to have a great gaming establishment right here—Oh! it will ruin the place, I know it will."

"Here comes Mr. Millfield, perhaps he has learned something about it."

"Sure enough, I will stop him and ask."

Just here a word or two about the building in question.

It was one of the finest structures that had yet been erected in the place, and there was a mystery about it.

Three stories in height, the upper part had been set off into suites of rooms on a grander scale than at the hotel, and more handsomely furnished.

The whole of the first floor had been left in one grand room, and now for some days furniture and fixtures had been arriving by freighters, and the place was being fitted behind closed doors.

Naturally enough there was much curiosity, especially on the part of the female portion of the population.

Who the owner of the building was, was yet unknown.

He had remained in the background, and the builder had refused to make known his name.

When Millfield came along by the piazza, Miss Cantril stopped him.

"Mr. Millfield," she cried, "I am dying with curiosity."

"That is certainly bad, Miss Cantril," was the response.

The worthy mayor stopped, lifting his hat.

"Can I be of any use to you?" he asked.

"Can I satisfy your curiosity in any way, and so save your life?"

"I am dying to know what that new building is for. Mr. Poke has been trying to find out for me, but has failed;—not through any fault of his, but because no one seems to know anything about it."

"Which is very true," attested the English dude, adjusting his eyeglass. "I could not find anybody who knew anything about it."

"Well, as it happens, I am able to gratify you," the mayor averred.

"Oh! how splendid!" cried the gushing Miss Cantril.

"It is to be a gambling palace," Millfield added.

"That is what was hinted at to me," declared Poke. "Nobody could give me any facts, however."

"Because no one had any facts to give," said the mayor. "I was informed by mail to-day that the proprietor will be here to open it to-morrow."

"And are you really going to permit such an establishment here?" the young woman asked.

"How can we help it?" asked the mayor in turn.

"But, it will be horrible!"

"It is one of those things that cannot be helped."

"Well, I suppose not. And if it is to be respectable, that will be in its favor."

"I think I can safely promise that it will be that."

"Do you know who the owner is?"

"Yes; his name is James Southway, and he is from the Southwest country. He has been in Denver for some time."

"Do you know him?"

"No."

"Well, Mayor Millfield, you cannot imagine what a relief I feel," laughing. "That building has given us ladies more trouble than you could guess."

A few further remarks were exchanged, and the mayor passed on.

"So, we are to have a gambling place, eh?" the young woman mused. "Do you ever gamble, Mr. Poke?"

"You could hardly expect a fellow to betray his own vices, could you?" was the counter-question.

"I suppose not; and from that I take it that you are guilty."

"Well, I must admit that I have played more than was good for my mind and pocket," was the admission.

"Then I am all the more sorry it is coming here."

"You have an interest in my welfare?"

"I take interest in the welfare of all my friends, Mr. Poke. I am happy to be able to number you among my friends."

"And I am proud of the honor, I assure you."

Just there they were interrupted by the coming of Mrs. Rainhard and her son.

"I find you in your accustomed places, I see," she said. "Allow me to introduce my son, Johnston Rainhard."

The names of the others were mentioned, and the mother and son took seats.

"Well, how do you like Daisy Drift, Mr. Rainhard?"

So inquired Frances Cantril.

"It is a beautiful little place," was the return, "but I am afraid I shall make my sojourn short."

"Yes? What is the matter?"

"Mother has been telling me about the terrible times you have been having with the outlaws."

"And I am afraid I have really alarmed him," said the fond mother.

"But, the danger is about over now," declared Frances. "We are well protected, and it is not likely the fellow will come any more."

"It is to be hoped he won't, truly," spoke up Mr. Poke.

"Has your mother told you all about the terrible man?" asked Frances.

"Yes, and it is truly terrible. I would not care to meet him. I suppose here we are safe enough from him, though, since you have a police force."

"Oh, yes, there is no danger, now; and I guess he will not bother the stages any more, either."

Two men came up the steps and advanced toward them.

They were the detectives, Raynold and Playfair, and they came straight to where Johnston Rainhard sat.

"We beg your pardon," spoke Raynold, "but we must ask you some questions."

The man seemed to turn slightly pale, and they noted it.

Mrs. Rainhard, too, seemed to grow alarmed, and even Miss Cantril. But, it was only natural they should, perhaps, since they recognized the men and knew who and what they were.

"Very well, gentlemen," Johnston agreed.

"We understand you are from Chicago."

"Yes, sir."

"You are a stranger to us, and we have orders to find out who and what every stranger is."

"Well, you know who I am, do you not?"

"Perhaps; but we are after proof."

"What proof do you want?"

"Anything that will show that you are not Genteel John, the outlaw, or an ally of his."

"Good heavens!" the man gasped, as he sprung to his feet.

Mrs. Rainhard, too, sprung up with a showing of indignation, and faced the detectives.

"How could you ever!" she cried. "You know he is my son, and that I have been looking for him for days. How could you?"

"We are not saying we believe anything of the kind, madam; but, we must be sure of every stranger, you know. All we ask is some proof against what we have named as bare possibilities."

"But, it is an insult to us!" cried the mother.

"And I will not submit to it!" cried Johnston.

"You have not been treating others in this manner," Mrs. Rainhard added.

"You do not know what we have done, madam. We investigate very quietly, and that is the end of it. We came very quietly to you, and if there has been any excited remarks you have made them."

"What proof can I offer you?" the son inquired.

"Any proof that you are just what you claim to be; that is all we ask."

"Will letters from my mother here satisfy you? I have several that I have received at different places."

"That will just satisfy the bill, sir."

"Then here they are."

Johnston Rainhard took some letters from his pocket and picked out three or four which he handed over for inspection.

The detectives looked at them critically, and finally handed them back with an air of much satisfaction.

"That settles it," they said. "Sorry to have troubled you, Mr. Rainhard, but you see how it is."

"To think that I should be taken for an outlaw!" the man exclaimed, indignantly. But the next instant he laughed, remarking what a joke his friends would have upon him if they should hear of it.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHO IS THIS MAN?

It was by the first stage, on the following day, that another new-comer arrived at Daisy Drift.

He was a man about thirty years of age, at a guess, good looking, with a mustache and full beard, the latter parted on the chin.

Above the medium in height and proportions, he looked to be an athlete. He was dark, and his hair, beard and eyes were black. His eyes were keen and penetrating in their glance.

He was elegantly dressed in the finest cloth, and wore a big, sparkling stud upon his shirt front. A handsome chain crossed his vest, and a cluster diamond ring glittered upon a finger of his left hand. He wore a silk hat and patent-leather boots.

No sooner had he alighted than he claimed the attention of all.

He looked around him in a cool manner, taking a general survey of the village camp and its citizens.

That done, he entered the hotel in an easy, graceful way.

Inquiring for accommodations for a few days, he obtained what he sought and registered his name.

He set it down thus:

"JAMES SOUTHWAY,

Daisy Drift."

Having done that, he turned away, but the landlord, after glancing at the inscription, called him back.

"You have made a mistake, sir," he said.

"I guess not," the stranger denied.

"But you have. Here you have set down your residence as Daisy Drift. You don't belong here."

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I do belong here. I begin my citizenship this day. I am proprietor of the Paris Salon, which I shall open this evening."

"Oh! that's it, hey?"

"That is it, sir."

And with that the elegant stranger lighted a cigar and turned away, sauntering out to the piazza.

There he took a seat and viewed the surroundings while he waited for the signal to

dinner. It was by the morning stage he had come.

Daisy Drift had now two stages daily, as perhaps has been mentioned.

Other passengers had come by the same stage, but this was the only one to claim particular attention.

Shortly after the man had taken his seat on the piazza, Joel Sparkers entered the office of the mayor in something of an excited manner.

"Well?" the mayor asked.

"Did you see the stage come in?"

"Yes."

"Notice the passengers?"

"No."

"Well, he has come."

There was no one present but these two, and the mayor sprung to his feet.

"You mean Genteel John?" he demanded.

"The same."

"And without disguise? Impossible!"

"Oh! no; he thinks he is disguised, I have no doubt."

"But, you got onto him."

"You bet."

"Well, who and what does he pretend to be?"

"He has registered as James Southway."

"The deuce! Why, that's the proprietor of the Paris Salon."

"I know it; that's what he has said. And he has come to stay, too. He has set down his home as Daisy Drift."

"It can't be John Heathcote, then."

"But, I tell you it is. I think the detectives are onto him, too."

"Then the man must be a fool. He must know it will be sure death to come here and be taken."

"He hasn't been taken yet."

"But, there is every chance that he will be."

"I don't know about that."

"You don't know about it! Do you suppose one man can stand against this whole town?"

"No; but, when he is taken his identity has got to be proved, you see."

"Ha! I see. Then you are of the opinion that he is relying upon his disguise to save him, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, it won't."

"He will make a good fight for it, though. He has not gone to all this pains and expense for nothing, you can bet."

"Say, are you sure, positively, he is the man?"

"Well, now, that is putting it right down fine. I can't swear to it, of course; and, it is just that doubt that may carry him through."

"Then the only thing to be done is to bring the proof against him, somehow. But, how is it going to be done?"

"We must leave it to the detectives to do that."

"If they can do it."

"They are not fools by any means."

"Nor are they all as able as they might be. I wish we could count Pearsman on our side."

"So do I, but we can't."

"Still, if your suspicion is correct, we will not need him, once we have the proof."

"How would it do to arrest the man anyhow, on suspicion?"

"There is the doubt in the way."

"Might make a mistake, eh?"

"And then he could make it warm for us, if he wanted to."

They were silent and thoughtful for some moments, considering the matter. It was one that puzzled them both.

"I'll tell you one thing," said Sparkers, presently.

"What is that?"

"We have got to keep our eyes open for this fellow, considering the letter you received yesterday."

"Just what I was thinking about myself. I think I begin to see through the little scheme, now."

"Do you?"

"Yes."

"Well, what do you see?"

"Somebody is backing John Heathcote up with money, and he has taken this step toward beginning his campaign for right and revenge."

"What need has he for any one to back him, after all the bold robberies he has been committing?" asked Sparkers.

"Ha! ha! Well, that's so; that's the way the camp will look at it when suspicion falls upon him. And we'll see to it that suspicion does take a drop in his direction."

"Wait till you see the man to judge for yourself."

"Oh! I'll do that, but at the same time I think your opinion is to be trusted."

"Mine is only one, however. Wait till you hear what the detectives have to say about it, too. I saw them looking at each other pretty sharply."

"They'll report— Ha! some one is coming now. Mum."

"Mum it is."

Steps had been heard, and the door opened and two of the detectives stepped into the office.

They were the private detectives, Playfair and Raynold.

Closing the door after them, they looked around to note who was present before speaking.

Seeing only Sparkers, besides the mayor himself, and knowing he was trusted by the mayor, Raynold hastened to announce:

"Well, mayor, we believe we have found the man."

"Yes?"

"Exactly. I guess Sparkers has been telling you something about it, hasn't he?"

"He has a suspicion."

"The stranger?"

"Yes," said Sparkers.

"He is the man, dollars to cents," declared Playfair.

"Have you any proof?" questioned Millfield.

"Well, not direct, but we have the evidence of our eyes. He answers to the description of Genteel John."

"So might a good many men."

"Then you doubt that it is he?"

"I must have proof that it is, you know."

"And that is what we must set at work to get for you. We'll try to work up the case, now that we have got something to work on."

"You see how it is," said Raynold. "He answers well to the description of Genteel John, except the beard, and he has now been absent long enough to have grown that."

"Then, the wealth he displays. His robberies account for all that."

"It's as plain as can be," agreed Sparkers.

"And, if you remember, this new building was begun shortly after that big Express robbery."

"That's so," cried the mayor. "Boys, I believe you are on the right track. But, it is a game that you will have to work carefully, for you will have to bring the proof to bear, you know."

"Yes, we know that, but we'll get there. I think if we allow him to have plenty of rope he will tangle himself up in it."

"Genteel John is a shrewd fellow."

"We have tackled that sort of men, before, though."

"Well, what are you going to do? How will you go for him?"

"If the others do not interfere, I think we'll let him show his hand first, and we can see what he is going to do himself."

"Not a bad idea. I understand he is going to open the Paris Salon to-night. And, as he has corresponded some with me, I have no doubt he will call on me shortly. If he does, I'll not let on that he is suspected."

CHAPTER XVII.

CONSIDERING MR. SOUTHWAY.

MAYOR MILLFIELD was not mistaken.

He was in the office after dinner when the stranger dropped in to see him.

Mr. Southway introduced himself, and proceeded at once to make known the object of his visit.

"You know, of course," he said, "that it is my intention to open a gaming palace here."

"So your letter informed me, sir," answered Millfield.

"Yes; and such being my intention, I must arrange with you concerning the amount of license I must pay."

"You will be required to pay a license, of course."

"How much?"

The mayor named the sum, and it was not a modest one.

"That is pretty stiff," the elegant sport remarked. "If that is the figure, however, no use kicking."

"That is the sum."

"Very well, and here is the money."

The money was taken and a receipt given, and the transaction was done.

"It is my intention to open my place to-night," said the gambler, then. "I shall throw my house open free to everybody the first evening."

"What will cost you something?"

"I can stand it. Besides, it will advertise me."

"Yes, I suppose so. By the way, Mr. Southway, a word of caution to you."

"And what is that?"

"Your place must be kept orderly."

"I never kept a place yet that was not orderly, sir."

"That is good. You see, sir, we have quite a fashionable town here, and it is growing more so every season. We must protect our good name."

"You need have no fear of me. Inquire about me at places where I have run similar concerns, and see what you will hear. They will all tell you that Royal Jim, as they call me, keeps a decent place."

"Where have you been established?"

"Well, at Austin, Dallas, Los Angeles, Frisco, and a dozen other places in the South and West. Besides, I have presided over gambling palaces in the East."

"No doubt you are all right, but I had to caution you. We will not tolerate anything that is disorderly, you must understand."

"I do understand that, sir. By the way, drop in and see me this evening when I get started."

"I'll do so."

A few words more and Mr. Southway took his leave.

No sooner had he gone than Joel Sparkers, Detective Raynold, and Detective Playfair, appeared from behind a partition.

"Well, what is your opinion?" Sparkers demanded.

"It is divided against itself," was the response.

"Then you believe it is he, and yet you don't?" said Playfair.

"That is it, sir. This man is certainly like Heathcote, and yet if it is Genteel John he is a perfect actor. His eyes met mine without a sign of recognition or anything else. He met me as a perfect stranger."

"What else would you expect?" asked Raynold.

"Nothing, of course; yet I did not think any one could play it so well."

"From what we know about Genteel John, and from what we have heard of him, it need not surprise us."

"But, you noted what he said about the places where he has had gambling palaces, and the references he gave me. What about all that?"

"May be a bluff."

"Suppose it is not?"

"Then our suspicion amounts to nothing."

"Unless," suggested Detective Raynold, "the fellow has bought up the real James Southway's good will and interest, as it were."

"Have you ever heard of the man before?"

"I have heard of a gambler called Royal Jim. That is the name this man lays claim to."

"Well, he either is or he is not, and it is for you men to decide," said the mayor.

"Keep your eyes and ears well open, and sooner or later you will get at the bottom of it."

"But, we want your opinion, the best you can give," persisted Raynold. "We never saw this Genteel John ourselves, you know, while you have. In which direction is your opinion inclined to lean? Is your suspicion stronger than your doubts?"

"Yes, it is."

"Upon what do you base it, then?"

"On the appearance of the man's eyes. This fellow's eyes are the eyes of Genteel John."

"Ha! that is something. It is hard for a man to disguise his eyes, and your recognition of them may be all right. However, we'll watch him well."

The two took leave, Sparkers remaining.

"You and I can talk a little plainer when alone," the tool observed. "You believe, then, it's Heathcote, do you?"

"I do. This man is about his age, and dark. He is of about the same height and build. Then, best of all, his eyes."

"I'm glad you agree with me. Now, the question is, shall we do away with him, and so—"

"Sh!" the mayor cautioned. "No such talk here, Joel. No, that is not to be thought of, since my revenge will be so much the sweeter to see him hanged, as he ought to have been weeks ago."

"But, for our own safety—"

"Don't get alarmed. We have begun it, and we must carry it to the end. You know our testimony would have hanged him, had he not escaped as he did. We cannot take that back. And, should he discover the real murderer of Kinross, with the strongest kind of proof, still our sworn evidence would stand in his way."

"That's so."

"Oh! we have got him in the worst kind of way, you bet. He is in a bad box. He cannot clear himself, and as soon as he falls into the hands of the officers he will have to swing."

The rascal laughed over his diabolical scheme.

"Well, say, Millfield?"

"Say on."

"Have you ever been able to get any suspicion as to who did kill that man?"

"Never."

"A curious thing, was it not?"

"It was, indeed. I am often inclined to think Heathcote really did do it."

"Do you know, I have thought the same thing, and perhaps we were only helping Providence when we said we saw him do it."

"It might be. Anyhow, it does not trouble my conscience much, one way or the other."

"Hardly."

"And what about the other men?"

"The ones who came by the stage yesterday?"

"Certainly."

"They are not in it. The one is the old woman's son sure enough. The other is a banker from Chicago who has come here to buy out Colonel Lyndon."

"What? Lyndon going to sell out?"

"Yes."

"I ought to have known that and bought him up myself."

"Doubtful whether he would deal with you or not. He has no love for you, as you know."

"Yes, curse him! I know it. He believes Heathcote was innocent of that murder, and believing that, he believes you and I perjured ourselves."

"But, we know better, don't we? Ha, ha, ha!"

"To be sure."

"By the way, mayor, I'd like to have a hundred dollars on account."

"Do you think I am made of money, Joel Sparkers?"

"Well, no, but I know you have got a good deal more of it than I have, and you must ante when I call, you know."

"But, are you aware that you are draining me to the tune of two and three hundred dollars a week?"

"You hadn't ought to kick at that. Be glad it's no more."

"I'll tell you what is going to happen, pretty soon, if you keep on as you are going now."

"What's that?"

"I'll defy you, and cast you off."

"Oh, no, you won't; I'm not afraid of that. I backed up what you said that night, you know."

"And if you try to retract, it will be as bad for you as for me, and worse. You and I have got to come to a definite understanding about this matter, and it may as well be right here and now."

Sparkers looked a trifle uneasy.

Perhaps he realized that he had gone a step too far.

"Well, what sort of understanding?" he asked.

"I'll give you a stated sum per week, to hold your tongue and at the same time to aid me further when occasion requires, and at that you must stop."

"How much will it be?"

"Well, say fifty dollars."

"I won't take it."

"Why?"

"It's not enough."

"Nor will I be robbed as I have been."

"Make it an even hundred, extra above my pay as your helper, and I'll do it."

"Very well, a hundred, then. And it will be useless for you to ask any more, for you will not get it."

"But the hundred must begin with this week, for I must have a hundred down now."

"All right, let it begin now. I'll save money even so. But it must also be understood that you are to be ready for any work I may lay out for you to do."

"You'll never find Joel Sparkers behind the barn when he's wanted, you can bet on it. Let me know when you want to use me, and I'll be on tap. You keep your agreement and I'll do my part."

Millfield paid over the money to his tool, and Sparkers took his leave.

The mayor looked after him with a frown.

"Go it," he said to himself. "The time is coming when I'll have no further use for you, and then—"

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANOTHER ARRIVAL.

In the mean time the other detectives had been giving attention to the new-comer.

Pearsman had quietly noted him, but no one could tell what his impression was, from his face.

Joyce had tried to study Pearsman in that respect, but had long since given it up.

After the stranger had registered and had retired to the piazza, Joyce approached Pearsman and asked:

"Well, what do you think of that party?"

"I believe we agreed we could not work together, did we not?" Pearsman reminded.

"Oh! hang it, I am not asking you to work it with me; I am only asking you what you think of that man. Do you think it's John Heathcote?"

"I do not."

"No!"

"From the surprise you manifest, I take it that you do think this man is Genteel John."

"Yes, I am inclined to think so."

"Well, I guess you are not alone in your opinion."

"The others have the same idea, you think, then?"

"Yes."

"But, they are mistaken?"

"I think so."

"Well, see here, Pearsman, there's one question I would like to put to you in regard to this fellow."

"What is it?"

"Can you say positively it is *not* Genteel John?"

"Well, no, I can not. Men in our line know how very deceptive appearances are sometimes."

"That being the case, you can't blame me for having an eye on the party."

"Certainly not; I am doing that myself."

"On what grounds do you base the opinion that he is not Heathcote?"

"Well, on the ground that Genteel John is a man of hard sense, and he would not come here in a disguise that the merest detective gosling could penetrate."

"Then you admit there is ground for suspecting the man."

"If you cast your vote with the amateurs, yes; otherwise, not. I cannot believe Genteel John would come here that way."

"Well, now, Pearsman, I am not an amateur by any means, and hold that there is good ground for a difference of opinion here. I would like to argue the thing with you."

"Well, go ahead."

"It might help us both, you know."

"Possibly."

"Well, it will help me, I know, if I am wrong. We ought to be able to convince, one or the other."

"Go ahead, then, and convince me that this man is John Heathcote in disguise. If you fail then I'll try to convince you that it is not he."

"I'll do it. In the first place, this outlaw is as bold and daring as a famished tiger. He will—"

"Pardon me, Mr. Joyce. This brings us back to our difference of opinion. I hold that John Heathcote is innocent of the crimes that have been laid at his door."

"That's so, that's so. There's no use our trying to agree upon anything in this case. But, I'll go on and give you my view of it, anyhow, since I proposed the thing and have commenced."

"Yes, let's hear it all."

"Well, as I said, he's bold and daring. He takes the greatest kind of risks, and seems to hold his life cheap. He has made a good many rich hauls, and could well afford to put up a building like the Paris Salon, and furnish it in a manner worthy a Croesus."

"Exactly, from your point of view."

"Then, the manner in which the building has been put up, in secret as it were, adds to the strength of the suspicion. Why did not the man come here openly and show himself? Finally, at the last moment, he has appeared, under the name of James Southway, but in everything save his beard he answers well to the description of John Heathcote."

"Is that all you have to offer?"

"Seems to me it is enough."

"What is the man's object, admitting that it be Genteel John?"

"Well, in the first place, safety. If he can pass the ordeal and hold his identity out of sight, he will be safe. Then, the Paris Salon, in a place like this, ought to be a paying concern."

"Does that sum it all?"

"I might stretch a few more points, but I'll rest my case at that."

"Good enough. Now, I'll gratify you by giving you my view of the matter, from my standpoint, and you know what that is, now."

"That Genteel John and this highwayman are not one and the same."

"Exactly."

"That is understood. Go ahead."

"Well, I hold that this new-comer is not Genteel John, because he has made a display of wealth impossible for John Heathcote, who is not by any means a rich man. Then, too, he is running no risks of recapture, such as he would be in danger of were he to undertake a role like this. Moreover, what could he hope to gain by such a by-play? His object is to hunt down the murderer of Murdock Kinross, and so clear himself of that charge."

"But you must admit that this man answers well the description."

"Yes, so he does; but so would many men—many hundred of men. There is little in that."

"Then you do not encourage me any in my suspicion?"

"No."

"And yet, do you know, I think my argument is stronger than yours."

"Well, you are welcome to think that way."

"Are you going to give no attention to the man?"

"Nothing in the way of suspecting that he and Genteel John are one."

"Well, see here: You believe Genteel John and the road-agent are not one and the same; what about this man's being the latter?"

"On that point there is a possibility that you are right."

"Do you think I am right?"

"No."

"Confound you, Pearsman, you are a riddle."

"Not at all, Joyce; I am trying to make myself as plain to you as I possibly can."

"Then perhaps the fault is mine, and I am a blockhead."

"I must be stubborn enough not to agree with you there, either. You have a record which gives the lie to that."

"Well, is there anything we can agree on?"

"It seems we have agreed pretty well to disagree."

"And I guess that is about the only thing we can agree on here. It is more plain than ever that we cannot work together. There is no occasion for us to work against each other, though."

"None whatever."

And so they dropped the subject for the time. They have not been idly quoted, but with the purpose of showing how opinion at Daisy Drift was divided.

There was one great question, and that—If John Heathcote was there at the village camp, in what guise was he concealing his identity?

Since every other personage there had been subjected to severe inspection, and had passed the ordeal favorably, this new-comer, James Southway, had to bear, for a time at any rate, the full weight of suspicion.

Was he the man?

Let the reader judge for himself, having seen the question argued pro and con.

The afternoon stage on that same day brought another new-comer, but not one who could be suspected of being Genteel John.

It was a woman.

She was young, not a day over twenty-two, and pretty.

When the stage arrived the suspected sport, "Royal Jim," as he was already called, was the one to open the door and help her out.

Taking whatever she had to carry, he escorted her into the hotel.

The crowd looked after them, and many followed them in, having no further interest in the other passengers.

The sport left the lady in the parlors, and went to the office to register for her.

She wanted meals only, for the present, he told the clerk; she would occupy one of the suites of rooms over the Paris Salon.

The name he entered on the register was—

"ETHEL DEARBURN,

City of Mexico."

As usual, the detectives great and small—particularly the latter, were eager to learn the name of this pretty stranger who was under the protection of the gambler sport.

And when they did learn it, they thought they had new grounds for suspecting James Southway.

The young woman's appearance had told them plainly enough that she was an American, and her name added strength to the belief they had formed; but, it was here claimed that she was a native of Mexico.

Surely, there was something crooked.

The others who had come by the stage were two Mexican women, as their appearance bespoke, and two or three men.

The Mexican women had followed Ethel Dearburn into the hotel, and were plainly her servants, and thus her claim to citizenship in Mexico was in some measure borne out.

Two of the men looked after the baggage that was set down from the rack, and which was afterward taken to the Paris Salon.

Later on, Royal Jim conducted the young lady over to the Paris Salon, where, with her Mexican woman attendants, he left her, returning to the hotel himself.

This new-comer was the handsomest woman in the place, by long odds, and it was no wonder that she was looked upon with eyes of admiration and envy—envy on the part of the women there before her.

CHAPTER XIX.

A VICTORY HARDLY WON.

E. GARNET POKE, the English dude, was sitting on the hotel piazza after supper, when Frances Cantril joined him.

It has been said that she lost no opportunity of enjoying his good company, and he certainly made no effort to avoid hers.

They had seen the pretty new-comer at the table, and as Miss Cantril came up to where the young Englishman sat, she asked:

"Now, tell me, Mr. Poke, what did you think of that creature?"

"Aw—whom do you mean?"

"Why, that bold girl who ate tea with the princely gambler, to be sure."

"Oh! Why, I assure you, Miss Cantril, I considered her very beautiful indeed. His wife, I presume."

"Beautiful! She?"

"I thought so, truly; but, then, men are such poor judges of what beauty really is, you know. Your ladies have so much keener insight."

"And I thought men flattered themselves that they were the best judges in such matters."

"Certainly I am not one, then, Miss Cantril."

"Yet, by your own admission, you have passed judgment in this instance."

"No, no; I beg pardon, really; not my judgment, Miss Cantril, but my first impression; that was all."

"And that impression is that this young woman is beautiful, is it?"

"I thought her so, I must confess."

"Well, I must agree with you in one thing."

"And what is that?"

"That men are poor judges of woman's beauty. Why, Mr. Poke, I considered this person very plain indeed."

"I am glad to know how little my impressions are to be relied on, Miss Cantril."

"But, she is a coquette, with all the airs and arts of her kind, and I can see that she has for the moment dazzled you."

"I am glad to know it, Miss Cantril, and from such good authority, for I can be the better on my guard, should she have any evil intentions against me, don't you know?"

This was said in all seriousness.

The woman was silent a moment before she rejoined.

She had now taken a seat, and was prepared to defend her position.

"You almost lead me to suspect that you are trying to make a joke at my expense, Mr. Poke," she said.

"Trying to Poke fun at you, as it were, eh?"

So the young Englishman returned, laughing.

"And now you are so rude as to make a pun. Really, Mr. Poke, you shock me."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Cantril. I was trying to make no joke, and if I did pun, it was

upon my own name, so I may be pardoned. But, you did not express your opinion respecting the observation I made."

"And what was it? I fear I did not catch it."

"Why, I said I supposed the lady was the wife of the gentleman whose protection she accepts."

There was a toss of the head on the part of Miss Cantril.

"Perhaps," she said.

"You speak as if you doubt it."

"She certainly looks old enough to be his wife, if it were not for the paint and powder."

"Bless me! Paint and powder!"

"Yes. Could you not see that?"

"Pon me honor, Miss Cantril, I'll never trust my eyes again. I was admiring the freshness of her complexion, it was so rare, you know; and now to be told that it was only art—"

"And very poor art at that."

"Well, well, I told you men are the poorest of judges when woman's beauty is the thing to be judged. But, tell me, what did you think of her escort?"

"Mr. Southway?"

"Yes."

"Oh! I thought him very nice indeed."

It was her chance to take revenge, perhaps she thought, and she meant to improve it.

"Very nice! Good heavens! Miss Cantril, where can be your taste? Why, I took him to be a perfect cad, don't you know?"

"You did?"

"Yes; and I was wondering how so charming a creature as the young lady could endure his society."

"How strange that we should look upon them so differently, Mr. Poke. Why, did you not note the fineness of the gentleman's attire? How very well his clothes set on his handsome figure? And his jewelry—"

"Abominable! Quite out of taste."

"Are you taking revenge, Mr. Poke, for what I said so frankly about the woman?"

"Can you think I would stoop to that, Miss Cantril? No; I am merely giving you my own impression as freely as you gave yours."

"And may your judgment not be at fault here as well as in the other case?"

"It would be unpardonable of me not to admit it."

"Then I am going to insist that you are mistaken, sir. I look upon Mr. Southway as a gentleman, and I consider his dress quite in keeping."

"With his position? It becomes the gambler very well, I am forced to admit, Miss Cantril."

The woman flushed with anger now.

"Do you seek a quarrel with me, Mr. Poke?" she warmly demanded.

"Good heavens, no!" was the exclaimed response, with the dropping of an "h" in his haste.

"Then why do you cross me so persistently?"

"Bless my soul, Miss Cantril, I was only expressing my honest opinion. I was not aware that this man was anything to you—"

"Nor is he, either."

That was snapped out more vengefully than she had spoken yet.

"How very unpleasant that we should come to such an unhappy understanding. Permit me to beg your pardon and take the blame to myself, Miss Cantril, and we will talk about something else."

"I suppose I must accept your apology, sir."

"You would not hurt me so much as not to do so, I am sure," was the humble rejoinder.

"I am afraid we came very near to having a quarrel, Mr. Poke, with a forced smile. And how silly that would have been, when these persons are nothing to us. They are, of course, beneath us socially."

"To be sure," agreed the Englishman. "We were not speaking of them comparatively, except to compare them with each other."

"I suppose Mr. Southway will open his place to-night. Shall you attend?"

"Such was my intention, Miss Cantril. I was—pardon me—somewhat curious to learn what position the young lady holds in the establishment."

"You can not mean it, surely."

"But I do, Miss Cantril. And why not?"

"You owe it to our set, Mr. Poke, to hold aloof."

"But I can't, don't you know? I am as full of curiosity as—as—full as I can be."

"We have made up our minds not to recognize these persons in any way, though, Mr. Poke; and as for entering their place—"

Words could not express it.

"That is perfectly proper, if you think so, Miss Cantril. For me, though, I am free to come and go at will, and if your set will cast me out for so trivial a transgression, so be it."

"How provoking you are!"

"Not intentionally so, I assure you. I am breaking no engagement that I am aware of if I go."

"I wish I could induce you to remain away."

"And I suppose you could, if the inducement were strong enough."

"It will have to be a strong one!"

"Very strong indeed."

"Then I have no hope, although I had something in mind."

"What was it you had in mind?"

"I would scarcely dare to reveal it, now, knowing how useless it would be."

"Still, if it is something you had in mind before you learned what my intention is, you ought to tell me."

"Well, I was going to ask you to escort me for a walk up the canyon this evening. It will be moonlight, you know, and—"

"Say no more. No inducement could possibly be stronger, Miss Cantril, and I willingly yield the point."

The scheming young adventuress, as we well know her to be, smiled when she saw that victory was hers.

Her possible rival was distanced for the time being, at any rate.

Current gossip was not wrong when it hinted that she was playing to win the wealthy young Englishman.

He had shown evidences of his wealth since coming there, and some of his letters, which chance had permitted her to see, bore a title upon which her heart was set.

"How good of you!" she cried.

"Good to myself, rather," was the return.

At that point they were joined by Mrs. Rainhard and her son, and the conversation turned.

"I have a favor to ask of you, Mr. Poke," Mrs. Rainhard presently remarked.

"You have only to name it," was the response.

"My son is desirous of witnessing the opening of the Paris Salon this evening, but does not care to go alone, and as I heard you remark that you were going he would like to go with you."

"Would you go to such a place?" cried Frances.

"That is my desire," was the reply.

"And it was my intention, true enough," declared Mr. Poke, "but a greater inducement having been offered for the evening's pleasure, I have changed my mind. I am sorry, sir, but cannot help it. However, you can easily find other company."

Something of a light of satisfaction seemed to beam upon Mrs. Rainhard's face, at that.

Whether it meant anything or not does not appear, yet.

CHAPTER XX.

OPENING THE PARIS SALON.

DAISY DRIFT was full of excitement.

The opening of the Paris Salon was an event which had been looked forward to ever since the character of the place had become known.

Everybody was eager to get a view of the interior, and, as everything was to be free on this night, many were eager to taste the wares of the elaborate bar. There was a tempting bait.

That, however, was calculated to catch the common herd.

For the more fastidious ones a bait of a different sort had been provided.

And that was, the good-looking young lady who had come by the stage, and who had taken up her quarters at the Salon.

Nearly all of the young bloods and sports of the place were eager to see more of her as well as to learn what her relation to the gambler sport really was.

Before the hour for opening came there was a good crowd in the street before the building, made up of miners and laborers chiefly. The "bloods" and sports, curbing their desire, remained in the background.

Southway, or "Royal Jim," was on the piazza of the hotel talking with Mayor Millfield.

"I notice your citizens are somewhat eager for a peep into the new resort," the gambler made remark.

"Yes; and they are not backward about showing it, either," was the mayor's return.

"I suppose they are orderly fellows? But, then, the camp speaks for that."

"They are better than the average."

"And they look it."

"There are two or three really rough customers here, but they are kept pretty well under subjection."

"I suppose they are eager for the treat I have promised them."

"A good many of them are not willing to miss that."

"Well, they shall have it. I anticipate no trouble. We have a way of dealing with unruly customers which they will not relish, if we find any such."

"It is not likely there will be any trouble. I will speak to the men just before you open the doors, and so prepare them for what is required of them. I hope your venture will be a success."

"So do I, mayor. You have scorched me so heavily in the way of tax, that I must get even if I can."

"Couldn't help it, you see. Must make it high to keep out little concerns, which do more harm than good."

"I see. And, now that I am here, I do not care if you put it even higher against others, and give me the field."

"Perhaps we can come to some such an agreement as that, Mr. Southway."

"Never mind calling me mister; just make it Royal Jim, the name that has become so familiar to me."

"All right, just as you want it."

"That way is good enough."

"At what hour do you open?"

"Eight o'clock."

"Not far from that now. I'll say a word to the boys."

"It will be just as well, perhaps. And then I'll go over and see if everything is in order."

The mayor drew a chair to the edge of the piazza, and mounting it, called the attention of the crowd.

The Paris Salon was on the other side of the street, not far off, so the mayor was noticed at once and the crowd listened to what he had to say.

"Men of Daisy Drift," the mayor addressed them, "I have a few words to say to you. The new place over there is about to be opened, and I hope you will all observe the rules and regulations."

"Yer kin bet we wull do that."

"And ther free drinks, too."

"I hope the evening will pass without trouble of any sort. Mr. Southway, or Royal Jim, as he is known, is a gentleman, and he expects to treat every man of you as a gentleman. I hope you'll prove to him that you are. He intends to throw his bar open free to all—"

"Rah fer Royal Jim!"

"Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!"

"Yes, free to all, but not to make pigs of yourselves, of course. There will be one, two, possibly three drinks to a man, but no more."

"That's enough!"

"Only a darn hog would ask for more."

"And then, there is a very important reason why you should conduct yourselves like gentlemen while in the Paris Salon. It is presided over by a lady. I know you, however, boys, and I know that the reputation of Daisy Drift is safe in your keeping. I need say no more than that."

"That's what's ther matter," cried one.

"We won't disgrace ther town, you kin bet."

"Every man of us is a gentleman an' a scholar."

"An' we're ready ter give three cheers fer ther Mayor of Daisy Drift."

"You bet!"

"Out with 'em!"

"Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!"

The mayor lifted his hat and bowed, and stepped down from the chair.

Royal Jim took his place, and, with hat in hand, said:

"Citizens of Daisy Drift, I want to assure you of all your mayor has promised you, and more. This evening is to be yours, and for the occasion the Paris Salon is to be yours, too. We are there only to serve you. We are your friends. Everybody is welcome."

That was all, and more cheering greeted the words.

Royal Jim went at once over to the new establishment, while the mayor turned to talk with those on the piazza.

"I guess there will be no trouble there, he observed."

"Not likely," some one agreed, "unless that fellow Gorman comes there full and tries to run things."

"And if he does he will get laid out, that's all, if I have to do it myself. I have promised this man protection and he shall have it."

The man referred to was the local terror.

He was a big man, ugly when drunk, and was called Gore the Giant.

Powerful of frame and great in strength, he was feared, and no man there at the camp had over downed him.

He was not noticed in the crowd, and some one on the piazza gave out the hint that he had been seen in one of the saloons drinking pretty heavily.

But, he was soon forgotten.

Precisely at eight o'clock the doors of the new resort were thrown open, and the crowd poured in.

Greatly to the amazement of the roughs, instead of finding a bare floor their rusty stogies sunk into the soft pile of a rich carpet, and their footfalls made scarcely a sound.

"Gee whiz!" one fellow ejaculated.

"Ain't et jes' gorjus!" exclaimed another.

"Talk 'bout yer 'Rabian Nights—et don't compare!"

"Why didn't they tell us o' this hyar, so's we could 'a' cleaned our feet?"

Every man of them had some remark to offer, and most of them to the point, as the crowd surged in.

The Paris Salon was well worthy the name.

The large room was royally furnished, from floor to ceiling, with everything of the most costly sort.

The bar and its fixings, on the right, made up a work of art in itself, while the chairs and sofas opposite looked too fine for use.

Not a man of the crowd felt at home.

Further back were the gaming-tables, and at the extreme rear, standing upon a slightly raised

platform, stood the young woman queen of the salon, gorgeously arrayed.

She looked a queen indeed.

Standing in a strong light, radiantly beautiful, a smile of welcome was upon her lips.

A little distance away to the right stood Royal Jim, while several attendants in livery were here and there around.

Behind the queen, on each side of her dais, stood the two Mexican women, and behind her was the chief gaming-table of the room, behind which was a royal chair.

When the pressure from behind began to abate, as most of the crowd had gained entrance, those in front stopped as though in awe of this vision of loveliness which confronted them.

It was then that Royal Jim spoke.

"Men of Daisy Drift," he said, "allow me to present you to Queen Ethel, the presiding goddess of this establishment. You are her guests while here. Her word is law, and to her your homage is due. She welcomes you, one and all, to her domain. She will briefly address you."

"Yes, welcome indeed," the young woman spoke immediately. "You are my guests to-night, and the best of my establishment is at your command. There is the bar, free to all who desire that; here are the gaming-tables for those who desire to woo the goddess Fortune. Everything is free to-night, and I call upon you to enjoy yourselves as best you can."

She bowed, at that, and retiring behind the polished faro-table, sat down on her throne like chair.

"You understand," urged Royal Jim, then, "that you are heartily welcome here, and you must make yourselves at home. Do not be afraid to touch and handle things; that is what they are for. For the time being, everything is yours."

"Then blame me if I ain't goin' ter take a gulp at the bar," cried one rough fellow.

He advanced in that direction as he spoke, and his words and action broke the spell upon all.

There was a general scramble toward the bar, then, the two men who presided there speedily had their hands pretty full serving the throng.

While this was going on, others entered.

Now came the elite of the place, the bloods and sports, and leading them was the mayor, with whom came Johnston Rainhard.

These evinced no surprise at the elegance of the place, but all did advance to pay homage to the beautiful queen who presided over it, and to whom Royal Jim presented them.

Thus an hour passed quickly, and all the time the assemblage was being augmented by fresh arrivals, till it seemed that nearly the whole population of the town must be there congregated. Everybody seemed happy, and the Paris Salon was voted a success.

CHAPTER XXI.

MARRING THE PLEASURE.

EVERYTHING was peaceful, and everybody was happy, when suddenly a new-comer let out a wild yell that startled every one.

"Whoop-ee!" was the cry.

Everybody looked in the direction of the door.

There was the bad man of the town, Gorman, or Giant Gore, as he was called; or, as oftener—Gore, the Giant.

He was drunk and in a bad temper, as every one who knew him could see at a glance.

With his hands on his hips and his feet wide apart, he was staring around him in drunken amazement, but he was in nowise abashed by what he saw.

"Whoop-ee, yow-ow!" was his cry again.

Trouble was looked for, now, by those who knew the fellow and his moods.

One of the liveried attendants of the place stepped forward to him and politely requested him to be quiet.

Giant Gore stepped back, pushed his hat far up from his brow, and replacing his hands on his hips, with great drunken gravity demanded:

"Wull, now, what's ther matter wi' you?"

"There's nothing the matter with me," was the quiet rejoinder, "but if you want to remain in here you must be quiet."

"Whoop-ee! Whoop-ee! Waugh! You don't say so."

The fellow had yelled more wildly than ever, and now glared at the attendant defiantly.

No one offered to interfere, yet, and for two reasons.

First, no one was eager to tackle the giant; and next, many wanted to see how it would come out.

The man in the livery laid a hand upon the giant's shoulder and jerked him around facing the door, at the same time ordering:

"Be quiet, sir; otherwise you must go out."

Gore, the Giant, let out another yell, and with a sweep of his arm carried the attendant off his feet and deposited him on the floor.

"Any more of ye want some?" he cried. "If ye do, jest come right up hyar and tackle ther tornader. Hyer I am, with my wings all spread, and I'm ready ter tackle anything that walks, swims, or flies."

He gave another yell to fill up the measure. The other attendants had by this time reached him, and they laid hands upon him together. Giant Gore struggled and fought, swearing at a desperate rate all the time, and presently, by his overmastering strength, had brushed the men away from him, sending two more to the floor.

"What's ther matter hyer?" he demanded, glaring around. "Ain't a cizerzen got no rights hyer no more? Wull, I reckon he has, ef ther court-house knows herself, an' I reckon she do. Got any more o' them 'ar things? Ef ye have, trot 'em out an' let me eat 'em."

"Sir," spoke Queen Ethel, standing up in her place, "you must observe order here, or I shall have to turn you out."

"Wull, now, gal, that 'ar thing has been tried on already, I reckon," the fellow declared, with a drunken swagger. "And et didn't work worth a cent, either."

"But it will work next time. Will you keep quiet?"

By this time the men in livery had got themselves together, and were now ready for the signal to tackle the fellow again.

"I reckon I'll do jest as I please about et," the fellow retorted. "I don't take sass from no darn woman, I don't, an' you don't want ter try ter give me a bit of et, either."

"See here, Gil Gorman," cried Mayor Millfield, "you must either shut up or get out of here instantly."

"An' who is goin' ter put me out?" demanded the giant.

"I guess there are enough men here to do it, if those who have already undertaken it can't accomplish it."

"That's what's the matter," agreed one citizen.

"It will not be necessary to have much trouble about it, I guess, sir," now spoke up Royal Jim, who had been absent for a moment, and who now reappeared.

He strode straight out to where the giant was holding the floor, and as he came up to him, ordered:

"Now, sir, either you remain quiet, or out you go. We do not allow any one to raise a disturbance here, and that seems to be what you want to do."

"Who wants ter do et?"

"You seem to."

"Wull, I don't, not a tall. Jest 'case I kem in hyer an' let off a whoop o' joy 'cause I felt so good, is that any reason everbody should jump on me? I only said—Whoop-ee!"

He gave a loud sample of his yell, and again looked defiant.

"I'll give you half a minute to make up your mind what you will do, sir," the master of the place said with determination. "Either sit down or get out."

Gore the Giant looked at him from head to feet.

"I am of ther mind et will take more'n you ter put me out," he cried.

"Which are you going to do? Answer quick!"

"Which be I goin' ter do? I'm goin' ter do jest as I darn please, hyer or anywhere else, an' don't you ferget that. I'm a tall chief, I am, an' I kin climb ary galoot what I ever tackled yet, an' I guess I kin climb you. Waugh!"

Another yell.

The crowd pressed close, but no man attempted to interfere now.

One reason for their not doing so was that many of them wanted to see what sort of stuff the sport was made of, and this was a good chance to find out.

They soon learned.

With a leap the polished and diamonded sport was upon the giant, when, lifting him clear, he held him over his head and walked with him to the doors.

Loud cheering greeted his performance.

The doors reached, he gave the man a fling and deposited him in the dirt of the street.

If this was a fair sample of the prowess of the gambler sport, Giant Gore had certainly found his master at last.

That done, the sport walked quietly back into the saloon, rearranging his slightly-disordered attire, and smiled as serenely as though nothing had happened.

The attendants had followed him to the door, where they now took their station.

"That was a splendid feat," complimented Mayor Millfield.

"Oh! it was nothing," the sport declared. "Order must be preserved, you know, and that was only a mild beginning of what will happen if the foolish fellow persists in annoying us."

"I can well believe that you are capable of dealing with him."

"Or with any one else," was the declaration, without any appearance of boating. "We can keep order here, I guess."

"It looks that way."

By this time Giant Gore was up, and was bellying at the door.

He was held at bay, however, by the attendants there, who, in spite of the fact that he had once overcome them, were powerful fellows.

They had tackled the man in the first instance without any knowledge of his strength, and had

temporarily come to grief, but they were equal to the emergency now, and more.

"Let me in thar, I say," cried the giant.

"You cannot come in," he was informed.

"You had better go away."

"Let me in, I say, or by ther rip-roarin' ef I don't more'n jest demolish things 'round hyer!"

He made a dash, but was met with drawn weapons, and seeing that the odds was against him, and being sober enough to recognize it, he slunk away.

As he went he made dire threats, however, whether they were to amount to anything or not.

In the mean time Queen Ethel had opened a game at her table.

Such had not been her intention, on this night, she declared, but many urged her to do so, and she had at last complied with the request.

Among the players were Mayor Millfield and his companions, Johnston Rainhard, and Mr. Judson Pathfinder, the guest of Colonel Lyndon. And besides these there were some of the young bloods of the town.

The Lyndons, father and son, were there, but took no part in anything.

They had come only at the urgent request of their guest, for it must not be lost sight of that they were in mourning for Nydia.

At first the colonel and Jackson both had refused point blank, but afterward allowed themselves to be prevailed upon, since their going or not going could in no wise assuage their grief.

When their guest had taken a place at the gaming-table, however, they drew apart from him, and the more readily since they had no desire to come in contact with Millfield.

"Do you think he is treating us right, father?" Jackson questioned.

"Hardly," was the response. "He is not what he used to be; far from it. I repent of having asked him here."

"But, that was purely a business matter."

"Yet coupled with a friendly invitation to stay at our cottage."

"Would it not be right for us to go and leave him there, since he seems to have forgotten us?"

"I was thinking about that very thing. We are sadly out of place here anyhow, and I feel pretty bitter against myself for coming at all, and Nydia dead."

With the last words his voice was husky, and Jackson turned abruptly and advanced toward the door.

The colonel was right behind him.

At that moment Pathfinder glanced up, and seeing them going, called out:

"Hi! not going, colonel?"

Colonel Lyndon turned and answered with a nod, not caring to trust himself to speak just then.

"Yes, we are going," answered Jackson, bitterly. "This is no place for those who mourn, and you seem to have no further need of our company."

With that they went on, and out.

"Thunder!" cried their guest. "I believe they are in a huff over nothing. I will see you again, Queen Ethel, and finish my play. I must go and make it right with my friends."

He quickly settled his account with the bank, and went out.

Mayor Millfield, and many other interested witnesses, gazed after him.

CHAPTER XXII.

SPRINGING A SURPRISE.

"WELL, what do you think of my position now?"

The speaker was Detective Joyce, and the person addressed was Detective Pearsman.

"The same as before," was the response. "I see no reason yet to change my opinion regarding the matter."

They were in the Paris Salon.

The remark was made while the playing was going on at the table over which the queen of the salon presided.

It was after Judson Pathfinder had gone out, as told at the closing of the preceding chapter, and the place was as quiet and orderly as it had been before the trouble with Gore the Giant.

All the detectives were present, and Joyce had just moved around where he could speak to Pearsman.

"Then you do not see further evidence that this gambler sport is Genteel John in disguise?"

"I cannot say that I do."

"Where are your eyes?"

"In place, I guess."

"You are a puzzle to me. I cannot understand how it is you will not notice things which are so very plain to everybody else."

"There are some things not worthy of notice."

"And this is one?"

"You have not said yet to what you refer."

"True enough. Well, did you not note the agility and strength this man possesses?"

"Yes."

"And it has been said that John Heathcote has unusual athletic powers."

"So he has."

"Then is it not proof further that this is he?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Can you imagine that John Heathcote would come here and display the very characteristics which would give his disguise away?"

"Might he not think his disguise too perfect?"

"If I were to allow myself to think this man is he, I should consider it no disguise at all."

"Hail then there is some excuse for my thinking as I do."

"None whatever, from my point of view. From your own there is the best of ground."

"Well, well, I can't understand you, and will not try to, further."

"Not so long as you hold to your present ideas regarding the case, that is sure."

"Are you trying to convert me?"

"Not at all."

"If you are, you will have to advance far stronger argument than you have yet. But, hail what's this?"

There was a slight commotion across the room from them.

Looking, what was their surprise to see Detective Raynold and Detective Playfair in the act of arresting Royal Jim.

Each had a hand on his shoulder, and each had a revolver presented at his head in a dangerous way.

"What means this?"

So the gambler sport asked, quietly.

"It means that you are arrested on suspicion of being the outlaw, Genteel John."

In a moment all was excitement.

Every person had sprung up, and a crowd immediately gathered around the detectives and their prisoner.

Queen Ethel left her place in haste and made her way to where the prisoner stood, smiling and confident.

"This must be a mistake," she said.

"It not only must be, but it positively is," declared the sport.

"You will have to prove that," said Playfair.

"You are our prisoner, and you are warned not to resist."

"The thing I have least intention of doing, gentlemen."

"And you are warned, too, to be careful what you say, for it will be used against you."

"I have only this to say: That you are making the grandest mistake of your lives, this time. I am not your robber, gentlemen."

"Upon what grounds have you made this arrest?" demanded Mayor Millfield, as he pushed his way to the front, with a great showing of indignation.

"Upon suspicion, sir," was the answer.

"How could you suspect this gentleman so grossly? Upon what grounds are your suspicions based?"

"We prefer not to answer those questions now, mayor," said Raynold. "That would be to show our hand before the right time. At the examination we will set forth our reasons in full."

"And I would request that he be examined at once, gentlemen," spoke up Queen Ethel.

"As he shall be," cried Millfield.

"It is all the same to us," agreed the detectives. "The sooner the better, perhaps. We are ready to show that we had good grounds for our action."

"It is to be hoped you had, for you have made a serious mistake, I am satisfied of that," Millfield rejoined.

"What do you think now?" demanded Detective Joyce of Detective Pearsman.

"I think they have made asses of themselves," was the candid reply.

"But, if they happen to be right, they have snatched the plum just the same, and we are not in it."

"Don't let that trouble you. There will be an immediate examination, and you will see the man clear himself all right. It will destroy your own suspicion against him."

"I am eager now to see whether it will or not."

"Count yourself lucky that you are not in this thing with them."

"My reputation would be in jeopardy?"

"Exactly."

Meanwhile everybody was talking, and the excitement was great.

The crowd had packed itself around the detectives and their prisoner until there was scarcely room for them to move.

The detectives had few, if any, supporters in the crowd. The royal manner in which Royal Jim had been entertaining had won for him the support of everybody, and they had voted him a "chief."

Millfield now sprung upon a chair and ordered the crowd to fall back.

"Make room, boys, make room, make room!" he ordered. "There is hardly space to breathe here. Fall back, every man of you, and some one go and fetch Justice Russet at once. Mr. Southway shall have a hearing as quickly as possible."

"You need not handcuff me, gentlemen," the sport was saying at the same time to the detectives. "I do not mean to attempt to escape."

"Of course you will not handcuff him!" cried the mayor.

"You are warned not to try to escape, then," cautioned Playfair. "We will find means to stop you if you do."

"Have no fear of that," was the smiling reply. "If you attempt to handcuff me, though, I will resist that, for I have never had the steels on my wrists and never expect to have them there."

"Well, we'll take your word," Raynold compromised.

The crowd, at the same time, had fallen back, and more room was made around the prisoner.

"I am sorry for this thing, Mr. Southway," spoke the mayor. "You may be sure it is something in which I have had no part. But, you will be able to clear yourself of this ridiculous charge, of course."

"I certainly hope so, at any rate, mayor. No, of course you are not to blame in the matter. I can see that."

"Where will you have the hearing, sir?" asked Queen Ethel.

"Right here as well as anywhere," answered Millfield.

"Very well, your justice may occupy my seat here on the dais, and the table can be moved out of the way."

She called to the attendants and ordered the table removed, and chairs were placed for the accommodation of the prisoner and others.

Several men had obeyed the mayor's order about going for the justice.

There was a buzz of excited comment in the room, and everybody was talking with his elbow neighbor and discussing the merits of the case.

Royal Jim was as cool and smiling as ever. He seemed to be the least excited of any person there present.

The peerless Queen Ethel, too, was cool and calm in manner, now, though she had exhibited a trifle of excitement at first.

"This is rather different from what I anticipated for this evening," the prisoner observed.

"I should say it must be," agreed the mayor. "For my part I can't see how suspicion has fallen upon you."

"Who is this Genteel John? If I may ask."

"Is it possible that you have not heard of Genteel John?"

"I have heard of an outlaw with some such name as that, and these gentlemen arrest me for an outlaw they say."

"That is it. Genteel John, or John Heathcote, his real name, has been a terror to this part of the country for some time. He is a murderer for whom the gallows is waiting."

"Then if a case is made out against me I am in danger."

"You might be, if they could prove you to be John Heathcote; but, how are they to do that?"

"They seem to know."

"We only suspect, understand," reminded Raynold. "You are arrested on suspicion only."

"That is bad enough. Don't you think, though, gentlemen, it would have been better to have waited till you could make out a sure case against me?"

"And let some one slip in ahead of us and carry off the reward?"

"Hal! that's where it lies, is it?"

"We have not been working for fun, be sure of that."

"I suppose not; but, you will have had your labor for naught."

"That remains for you to prove. If you are Genteel John, none of this bluff work is going to serve you, be sure of that. If we have made a mistake we stand ready to take water in big doses."

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNDER A CLOUD.

THOSE who had gone to bring the justice were not tardy about it.

In a little while they were back again, bringing him with them, having explained what was wanted.

Justice Russet was a man past the prime of life, with iron gray hair and beard, and a pair of keen little eyes that were quick and penetrating.

When he entered the Paris Salon, Mayor Millfield hailed him at once.

"Right this way, Justice Russet," he called out. "Here is a case requiring your service."

"All right, mayor, here I am," was the response, and the little man—Russet was considerably under the average in size—made his way to the front.

The chief seat on the dais had been reserved for him.

When he took his place there the chair seemed to swallow him, but it did not swallow his voice.

"Now, what is required of me?" he asked.

Although he had been told, he saw fit to have it explained again in the presence of all.

"Well, the case is this," answered the mayor.

"Mr. Southway has been arrested by these two detectives on the charge of being Genteel John, the outlaw, and he demands a hearing at once."

"Ah! Very well, let me have a jury."

There was a constable in the crowd, and he

was told to get a jury together as quickly as possible.

This was speedily done, neither the detectives nor the prisoner raising any objections against any of the men chosen for that duty.

Presently all was ready.

"Now," said the justice, "I am ready to hear the case. If the charge is sustained, the prisoner will be held for trial. If not, he goes free."

The prisoner rose to speak.

"I accept the situation," he said. "Let my accusers present their proofs, after which I will try to defend myself. I believe that is the usual way."

"That is the way, sir."

The prisoner sat down, and Detective Raynold rose to make the charges.

"We have made this arrest upon suspicion," he said, "feeling that we were justified in so doing. We are not prepared to prove the man's identity, perhaps, but we want him held till we can do so."

"That is hardly in my line," said Russet. "You are doing this upon your own responsibility. If you cannot support your charge at this time, I must order that the prisoner be set free."

"We know that; yet we think the suspicions will warrant you in holding him. When he first arrived here we saw that he answered well the description of Genteel John. Then, we questioned whether it might not be he. The outlaw had not been heard of since about the time the erection of this building was begun. A good deal of money had been spent here. After his rich robberies the outlaw was prepared to spend money freely if he chose."

"Your line of argument is not altogether unreasonable; but, you have no proof, it appears."

"So I admitted, sir."

"Well, have you any further grounds?"

"Yes. We have been told that John Heathcote was a giant in strength, and this man has proved himself such in the way he handled Giant Gore this evening. We want him to prove that he is not Genteel John, and if he cannot do so, then, we claim the rewards that are offered for him. If he can prove it, then we have no more to say except to offer a humble apology for our mistake."

"What do you think?" asked Joyce of Pearsman.

"I think—Thou fool!" was the half indignant response.

"And I am of the opinion myself that they have gone off at half-cock."

"All owing to their own eagerness not to miss the reward. They deserve to lose it now."

"And is that all you have to say?" the justice had asked.

"That is all."

"It is a weak case."

"Yet it may be a strong one."

"By what authority did you make the arrest?"

"We are detectives having that power."

"By what power can you hold this man if I let him go?"

"Well, it is like this: If we have not sufficient hold upon him to warrant you in holding him, we shall not want him held."

"The prisoner has now a chance to speak to defend himself."

Royal Jim rose in his place as calm and cool as ever.

"I suppose this man Heathcote was well known to many of your citizens here, at one time, was he not?" he asked.

"He was," answered the justice.

"Then let those who know him well, step forward and say whether I am the man or not."

No one offered to do so.

"Mayor, you knew him, did you not?"

"Yes."

"Then you say, for one."

The mayor stepped up to the man and looked at his face searchingly.

As he did so, a puzzled look came over his own.

"You certainly look like John Heathcote," he said, "but still I do not want to say you are he."

"Don't be afraid to speak your conviction, sir."

"Let some one else say."

"Send for Colonel Lyndon," some one suggested.

"No, we object to that," spoke up Detective Raynold, quickly.

"Why do ye 'bjack?"

"Because, he is friendly to the outlaw and would not identify him at any cost and let us hold him."

"Then you want only men who will favor your position?" hinted the prisoner.

"No; we only ask for those who are not prejudiced."

"Well, let them come forward."

Several men were called, one after another, and while all said the man looked like Heathcote, no one would say he was the man.

"Then, would you hold me, and perhaps hang me, just because I happen to look like Genteel John?" Royal Jim asked.

"I think we can hold you till we can bring further proof," answered Playfair.

"And I hardly think you can," was the re-

tort. "Since you cannot prove me to be the person you have suspected me of being, I demand my liberty until you can bring further proof. At the same time it will give me the chance to bring ample proof as to who and what I am, and to gather the material for an alibi, if it comes to that. What is the amount of bail, Justice Russet?"

"Since you are not my prisoner, I have no hold upon you, sir," was the reply to that.

"Then, gentlemen," to the two detectives, "I demand to know what hold you have upon me. If you have no better authority to show than the bare fact that you are detectives, the quicker you take yourselves off the better."

"There, you see," said Pearsman to Joyce,

"is just where he has got them."

"Can't they hold him, then?"

"Does it look like it?"

"But, they suspect him, and he has not dis-

proved it."

"They have got to give him the chance to do so. They fired their gun a little too soon."

The two detectives, Raynold and Playfair, were greatly chagrined, and their faces showed it.

"Well," said Playfair, "since the justice here will not hold you upon our suspicions, you have the advantage of us. We have to release you; but, we declare our suspicions against you, and if they are borne out by the facts we want it understood by all that we were the first to pronounce them against you."

"Yes, that is understood; and, now, I propose three rousing hisses for a pair of jackass detectives. Who will join me?"

There was a loud shout of approval from almost everybody.

The gambler sport gave the signal and the hisses were loud and long, and it was ended with a dismal groan.

"It serves them right," spoke Queen Ethel.

"I cannot understand what ever led them to so mad a conclusion as that Mr. Southway is the outlaw."

"I guess they can hardly understand it themselves," said Royal Jim. "Don't be in haste to go, gentlemen; you are still welcome here; we hold no ill-will against you."

The abashed detectives were making for the doors.

"We have been plainly shown that we are not wanted," snapped Raynold.

"Could you expect me to submit to the indignity you put upon me without in some way retaliating? Hardly. And I did it in the mildest way I could."

"And you may regret it, if we can bring more proof against you."

"Whenever you get the proof, come along. I shall set to work at once to get together proof as to who and what I am."

"We'll see what you can do."

"Yes, you'll see."

The two passed out and the sport addressed the crowd.

"This evening has not passed as pleasantly as I could wish," he said. "You have seen, however, that it has been no fault of mine. In the first place, that bully who came in here to kick up a muss had to be ejected. Then came this stupid farce, if I may call it so. I assure you, gentlemen, that I am not an outlaw, and that I am not John Heathcote. If there are any among you who think I am, set to work and bring on your proof. The sooner the charge is removed, or proved true, the better I shall like it. I am placed in a shadow by the charge that has been made."

"But, we don't believe et all ther rame!"

So one man sung out.

"That's what we don't!" cried another.

And the whole crowd voiced the same sentiment in many ways.

"Well, I am glad you do not believe it, my friends," Royal Jim accepted. "I assure you it is not so. I am what I am, bad enough, perhaps; but I am no outlaw. And now all resume your pleasures, gentlemen, and perhaps the remainder of the evening can be spent without further drawbacks."

The enjoyment was not what it had been, however.

Men stood around in groups, discussing the situation, while those who resumed their games did so half-heartedly.

In many minds the seeds of suspicion had taken root, in spite of the general declaration to the contrary, and, as Royal Jim himself had said, he was under a shadow.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LOVE-MAKING EXTRAORDINARY.

IN the mean time E. Garnet Poke, the English dude, had kept his word with Frances Cantril, and the pair had gone for their walk up the canyon.

The night was a perfect one, just the sort for fond lovers to wander abroad, and the fair Frances hung upon the arm of the titled young Englishman in a way to show that the tender passion was aflame.

For a time their talk was nothing to interest us.

Finally, when they had gone quite a distance from the camp they came to a place where an inviting spot induced them to sit down.

"Do you think it is safe here, Mr. Poke?" Frances asked.

"Really, I do not see why it should not be," was the response.

"I was thinking of that terrible outlaw."

"Oh!" and the young man gave a start and looked about him. "I guess there is no danger, Miss Cantril."

"I hope not. But, then, you are here to protect me."

"If I could do it; for, they tell me this outlaw is a terrible man, don't you know?"

"And so he is, too."

"Speaking of him, dear Miss Cantril, leads me to say something that has been on my mind for some days now."

"What is it, Mr. Poke?"

She asked eagerly, but there was something of apprehension in her tone.

"Do you know, I love you, and—"

"Oh! Mr. Poke!"

"Yes, I love you, and I would make you my wife."

"Oh! Mr. Poke! Had we not better be going back?" making a move as if about to rise, but not doing so. "This—this is so sudden, and—"

"Yes, I would make you my wife, for in you I find those rare qualities which are so seldom found all together in one person. This has been my dream, dear Miss Cantril, and—"

"This is so sudden, Mr. Poke! I cannot—I dare not—deny that you are very dear to me, and—"

"And you would be mine?"

His hand touched hers.

She dropped her gaze, but her fingers gave her answer by a pressure.

"Then my dream would not have been in vain," said Mr. Poke, and he gave a big sigh. "But, alas!"

"What do you mean?"

So cried Frances, now, in a tone of some alarm.

"Alas! what might have been can never be, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"That the story I have heard be false."

"And what have you heard? If you were not prepared, why did you ask me to be your wife? What is the obstacle? You have led me to betray my secret, sir, in a very unpardonable manner."

"I did not ask you, dear Miss Cantril. You did not permit me to finish what I started to say."

"Then what did you start to say?"

"I meant to say, that I love you and would make you my wife were it not that an unexpected obstacle had sprung up in the way."

"And what is that?"

"I have been told that you are a divorced woman."

Frances flushed painfully, as the strong moonlight plainly revealed to the eyes of her companion.

"What need that matter, so long as I am free to marry whom I will?" she demanded.

"It should not matter, were I free to follow my own will," was the response to that.

"And why are you not free?"

"My fortune is at stake."

"Then love must yield sway to fortune?"

"A beggar has no business with a wife, Miss Cantril."

"But you are no beggar, I should imagine. Of course I know nothing about it, however."

"I should be, were I to wed other than a spinster."

"How strange. I fear I really do not half understand you."

"I don't wonder."

"You spoke about the outlaw."

"Yes, so I did."

"Why?"

"Because, the same person who informed me that you had been married, also told me you had had some sort of escapade with this Genteel John."

"It is false!" the woman flashed.

"Then I have been wrongly informed, though I placed much confidence in the person who told me these things."

"Who was that person?"

"It were treason to tell you that."

"Well, tell me what he told you."

"I may do that. He told me that you had imposed upon this Genteel John at a hotel in Denver, at the time of a great fire, and had put yourself in the place of his wife and so permitted him to carry you out, at the cost of the life of his wife."

"Oh! how false!"

"Then, that out of revenge, this man, Genteel John, had been instrumental in your marrying a rascal, a robber, whom he afterward exposed and sent to prison. You see I have food for reflection, do you not?"

"And that is the reason you will not now marry me, after leading me to an admission of my affection for you?"

"No, no; that has no weight with me. I would not care how many times over you had

been divorced, were it not that my fortune is at stake in the matter."

"Your love must be deep."

"Love must not be allowed to run away with sense."

"Suppose I were to say I would wed you even though you were as poor as a man can be?"

"Then I would say that your love had run away with your sense. No, that is not to be; and, it being so, I would still befriend you."

"You have not told me how this precious property of yours is to get away from you if you wed me."

"Easily told. It was left to me in such a way that, if I married a widow or divorced woman, it was to go immediately to the next heir. My father had bitter hatred for widows and such. If I marry a spinster it's all right."

"That's a peculiar thing, isn't it?"

"It is just so peculiar that it dashed all my hopes respecting you. I hoped the story I had heard was not true."

"But, Mr. Poke, my marriage was almost as though it had not been. In the same minute that I was pronounced the wife of that rascal he was arrested and taken away, and I never saw him again. You see it was almost meaningless."

"Yes; but it was none the less genuine."

"Yes, I am sorry to say."

"And that being the case, there is no use of my entertaining any fond hopes toward you."

"Do you truly love me?"

"Would I be talking like this did I not?"

"Then, could the difficulty not be surmounted?"

"How?"

"We could both swear that I had never been wed."

"I would be required to show the proof of it."

"That might be done, too."

"Yes; but there would be the chance that the truth would come out, and then where would I be?"

"Then it is plain that your love for me is not very strong."

"I would not dare to put yours to the test of poverty."

"And you are unwilling to tell me who gave you all this information?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I would not betray him."

"A friend of yours?"

"Let us not speak of him again. Will you permit me to give you a hint that may lead to your happiness, since we can never wed?"

"I care not what you tell me."

"There is another who has regard for you."

"I should feel poor indeed had I no more than one admirer."

"Yes, I suppose so; but, this one is one well worthy your attention, for he is rich."

"Do you think, Mr. Poke, that I am going to let you go free after the manner in which you have discarded me, after asking for my hand?"

"Good heavens! What do you mean to do?"

"I can sue you, and so spoil you of a part of that fortune you are so afraid of."

"You might if you could get at it, but that you could not do. No, that is not worth your while. I can show you bigger game."

"What is it?"

"You have seen the gentleman who is stopping at Colonel Lyndon's?"

"Mr. Pathfinder?"

"Yes."

"I have."

"Well, he has been inquiring about you, and I think you could win him and his immense fortune with little effort."

"That is cool, I must say."

"I know it is; but, since I cannot have you, I can afford to be generous to a rival, when it will be for your own good. What do you say to it?"

"I was never so insulted in my life, Mr. Poke!"

"I'm sorry for that, seeing that I am trying to do you a good turn. Marrying him, you would be lifted at once to the highest position society can offer you, and the past will be dead."

"You insult me more and more! Come, escort me back to the village immediately, or I go alone."

"I will escort you, certainly. I fear our walk has not been as pleasurable as you thought it would be. You do not hate me, Miss Cantril?"

"I almost hate you. You have wronged me. I hardly believe the story you have been telling me. I do believe you are in love with that thing at the Paris Salon, the reason for your action this very night!"

CHAPTER XXV.

REACHING A COMPROMISE.

WITH her words, Frances Cantril turned and walked away in the direction of the distant village.

Mr. Poke went after her at once, calling out:

"Really, Miss Cantril, I cannot allow you to go alone, don't ye know. You must permit me to escort you back again. I shall insist upon it."

"You may follow."

"Very well, if you wish it so, but I will follow very close."

The woman's breast was filled with the rancor

of a keen disappointment, and she bated this man.

It has been hinted that she had been seeking a marriage with him, owing to his wealth and title. Such had been the case.

Now her hope was gone, so far as that was concerned.

Not only so, but she had been put to shame by this "snob," as in her mind she termed him.

He could not marry her because she had once been a wife, though a wife in name only. He had brought her disgrace vividly before her, as though taunting her with it.

At any rate, so she felt.

They had not gone a great distance when the woman suddenly stopped.

She stopped and picked up a folded sheet of paper that lay in the path, and opened it, uttering an ejaculation of excitement as she did so.

The Englishman was only a step behind her, and he was at her side immediately.

"What have you found?" he asked.

"It need not trouble you," she snapped.

"Oh! it does not trouble me any, I assure you."

Frances was reading the note, which the paper was, by the brilliant moonlight which flooded the shallow canyon.

It was in these words:

"FRANCES CANTRIL, MURDERESS:—

"Once again you have felt the hand of Genteel John. Your scheme has been balked. You are an adventuress at best. You are not worthy the name of woman. You, who saved your life at the cost of that of my wife, beware. The hand of vengeance is against you. I spare your life, but not your peace and happiness."

"JOHN HEATHCOTE."

The Englishman seemed to be trying to get a glimpse of it, but she foiled him.

"This is not intended for your eyes, sir, and you need not expect to see it," she said.

She folded the missive and thrust it into her pocket.

"You are pale," Mr. Poke remarked.

"If I am it is with indignation at your conduct," she retorted.

"I am sorry."

"Which I do not believe."

"For which I am yet more sorry."

"Do you know we have been followed here?"

"No!"

He spoke the word in an exclamation of alarm.

"Well, we have, and by a foe of mine."

"Can it be possible? Then we must hasten back, and I insist upon walking at your side to protect you."

"Ha, ha! Little protection you would be against this foe."

"Who is he?"

"Genteel John, the outlaw."

"Good heavens!" with the loss of an "h."

"How much protection do you think you could be against him?"

"Let us lose no time in getting back, Miss Cantril. If the worst comes, I can but die for you."

"Would you do that?"

"I hope the occasion will not require it."

"Well, that makes me think a little less bitterly of you, anyhow."

"And I am glad to hear you say it. What does that terrible fellow say to you, if I may ask?"

"There is one thing I want to ask of you, Mr. Poke."

"And what is that?"

"If you will answer it, I will then tell you what you desire to know."

"Let me hear it before I promise."

"Who told you what you came to know about my life? I must know who that person was."

Her object was plain.

This note from Genteel John declared it had been he who had blocked her plans regarding marriage with this Englishman. Learning who had told Poke the secrets, she would have a clue to Heathcote's identity.

"I cannot tell you that," was the firm answer.

"But, I insist upon knowing, sir."

"That makes no difference, not a bit. I simply cannot disclose it."

"Well, was it some person at the village?"

"I cannot disclose anything regarding it."

"But I tell you I must know. It is really necessary that I should know, in order to protect myself against this foe."

"What foe?"

"Genteel John."

"What has he to do with me, or the person who told me these things?"

"I will tell you that, and very plainly. It was he who laid the plan for having this information brought to you."

"Bless me! you don't think that, do you?"

"I know it to be so."

"How do you know it?"

"Because, in this letter, or note, he taunts me of having been played with by you."

She did not express it rightly.

"You wrong me greatly," the Englishman declared. "I have told you my feelings toward you, and you know what I would seek, were it not that my father's will is in the way."

"I would not marry you, now, were you heir to the British throne."

"As I can well believe, for your pride has been made to suffer, though it was no fault of mine."

"It was brought about by this foe of mine, this John Heathcote, and if you have one spark of regard for me, and would help me to revenge myself upon him, you will tell me who your informant was."

"Impossible!"

"I will find out, though, in spite of you."

"That I cannot help, of course. You will never get it out of me."

They went on for some time in silence.

"Presently the woman stopped short.

"I have guessed it," she declared.

"You have guessed what?"

"Who told you."

"I hardly think so."

"And I feel sure of it. It was that Mr. Pathfinder."

"Oh! you are very far wrong, Miss Cantril."

"But, you mentioned his name to me, and since I have been thinking it over it impressed itself upon me that it might have been he."

"Not so at all, I assure you. I simply said he was my rival, or was likely to become so, since he is interesting himself in you; and I hinted that there would be your golden opportunity."

"Again you insult me! As though I need any one to choose a husband for me."

"You couldn't make a better choice yourself, of that I may assure you. He is immensely rich, and has many of those charming qualities which you yourself possess."

"You are generous to a rival."

"I have told you the reason."

"What do you know about this man, since he is up for discussion?"

"That he is rich, and that he is here for the purpose of making a deal with Colonel Lyndon for the mine."

"I infer that he is single."

Such a woman!

An adventuress, seeking only a moneyed alliance!

"How could it be a match if he were otherwise? And, it is not likely there will be found any impediment, as in my case."

"You speak as though I am thinking about your absurd proposition, sir. Do you think I am a woman without a heart?"

"Far from it."

"One would think so. I want to ask you, Mr. Poke, what reparation do you intend to make for the injury you have done me?"

"Bless me! as if I am not trying to open the way for you now. Am I not trying to open the way for you to get a husband who has even more wealth than I? And one whose means are unlimited, I might say."

"I will not be insulted further, sir!"

"What a strange creature a woman is, don't you know. What reparation would you have me make?"

"Unless you pay me a good sum, sir, I will sue you."

"That would be the height of folly, don't you know. That would be to waste time, and your chances would slip."

"You are enough to drive one to tears, almost."

"If you would only listen to reason. I'll tell you what I will do, if you will agree."

"What is it?"

"I will aid you to win this man for your husband."

"Insult added to injury! Sir, you shall pay me ten thousand dollars, or I sue you."

"Upon what grounds?"

"For breach of promise."

"Fie! I have promised you nothing."

"I will swear that you have, though, and everybody knows how attentive you have been to me. You have taken up all my time, to the exclusion of every one else."

"Was it not rather the other way? You first placed yourself in my way, and have retained the place pretty constantly, to be very plain about it, since you are so plain with me. However, I will consult my informant about it."

"No, no, do not do that. We will let it drop for the present. We will both let it plainly be understood that all is at an end between us, however."

"I agree to that, much as it pains me to give you up."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DISPUTED QUESTION.

WHEN they got back again to the village camp it was about the time when Royal Jim was ejecting Gore, the giant, from the Paris Salon.

"Hello!" exclaimed Mr. Poke, at the sight, "there seems to be some excitement here, Miss Cantril."

"So I observe," was the response.

"And I believe I will go in and see what it is all about, when I have seen you safely into the hotel."

"You are certainly at liberty to go where you please, Mr. Poke. You may get an opportunity

to see the fair Miss Mystery; for, you will not close your eyes to her, of course."

"You are a little rough on a fellow, don't you know, Miss Cantril."

"You confessed how much you admired her. Well, here is the hotel, and I will relieve you of the burden of my company."

"How cruel of you, dear Miss Cantril! If you only knew what it costs me to give you up so! But, since I may not possess you, do not forget the hint I have let fall."

"And how can I ever thank you for such thoughtfulness!"

This with an attempt at keenest sarcasm.

They had now come to the steps of the hotel piazza, and the woman tripped up them lightly, entering the house without even saying good-night.

The young Englishman smiled as the door closed after her, and turning, crossed over to the Paris Salon and entered there.

What was taking place there at the time has already been told.

About the first acquaintance Mr. Poke encountered was Johnston Rainhard, who had sought his company earlier in the evening.

"Ha! how is this?" Rainhard greeted.

"Surprised to see me here, of course."

"Yes, since you told me you were not coming."

"Well, you see, I am just free from my other engagement, and seeing some excitement here, thought I would drop in."

"You are late for the fun."

"So it seems."

"This man, Royal Jim as they call him, is the strongest man I ever saw in my life."

"Yes?"

"He certainly is. Did you see him throw that man out of doors?"

"He had just deposited him in the street as I came along."

"Why, he lifted him right over his head and hurled him out like a bag of meal, or something of the sort."

"How much do you think the man weighed?"

"The one who was thrown out?"

"Certainly."

"Not a pound less than two hundred."

"The proprietor here is no weakling, then, that is sure, though the feat is no very great one."

"I never saw it equaled."

"I have seen it surpassed."

"Possible?"

"Yes, truly. I once saw a strong man take two other men, heavy fellows both of them, and hold them out at arm's length, one in each hand. And not only that, but he threw them both through a window, one after the other."

"He must have been strong indeed."

"Oh! he was. He could lift a thousand pounds with no more effort than it would require of me to lift three hundred."

"Wonderful! Who was he?"

"Really, I have forgotten what they called him. But, no matter. This is a splendid place, is it not?"

"It is elegant."

"And Miss Dearburn—how beautiful she is!"

"Yes, she is beautiful indeed. Her lovely face will insure the success of the establishment."

"No doubt of it. Have you been introduced to her?"

"Yes, and have been playing at the table with her. My game is there still, and I see the players are returning."

"I will go with you."

"Yes, come on, and I'll introduce you."

So, the excitement over for the time, the players who had been engaged at the queen's table returned to their game.

There was no vacant place, so there was no chance just then for Mr. Poke to yield to temptation, but Rainhard introduced him to the queen and he sat down where he could feast his eyes upon her loveliness if so inclined.

Presently, however, the leaving of Judson Pathfinder made a vacancy, and the young Englishman took advantage of it.

He played, with no especial showing of skill, but did not risk large amounts. He seemed to have more attention for the queenly dealer than for the game itself.

"You are not a bold player, Mr. Poke," the queen remarked.

"Not very, Miss Dearburn," was the response. "I take it for granted that you are a

"Yes, sir."

He might be excused for the question on the ground that he was an Englishman, since they are held to be blunt and outspoken.

It was a question to which many present were glad to hear the answer.

"No, I am not a bold player, not understanding the game very well, but if my present luck continues, I may become bold."

"Do not play rashly, sir, unless you are prepared to lose."

So the woman cautioned him.

The game went on quietly, the young Englishman winning oftener than he lost, and so it continued until the interruption caused by the arrest of Royal Jim.

After that excitement, the game at the queen's table was not resumed.

Men stood about in groups discussing the situation, as said, and only the less important games were carried on.

Suspicion had taken root, and for the time being there was a cloud over the Paris Salon. Many had declared, however, their belief in the innocence of the proprietor and their confidence in him.

Shortly after the ending of the hearing, in which the justice found no case, Queen Ethel retired from the salon.

After her going, Mayor Millfield, Joel Sparkers, Johnston Rainhard, Detective Pearsman and others, among them the young Englishman, talked the matter over.

"It was a mistake," of course," Detective Pearsman declared.

"That is the way it looks now," agreed Millfield, "but I confess that at first I had a fear that the fellows were right. I say a fear, because this Royal Jim seems such a fine fellow that I would hate to see anything of that sort come of it. It would be impossible, though, for any one to play such a role and keep his nerve as he did. No, I agree with you, Pearsman, that Southway cannot be John Heathcote."

"And the fellows stand ashamed before the whole town," added Joel Sparkers. "But, it serves them right, for it was only their greed for the reward that made them so hasty."

"That was all."

"Can you imagine the fellow would dare to come back here again, after what has taken place, according to the stories I have heard of him?" asked Johnston Rainhard, of Millfield.

"Yes, I believe he would dare," was the reply, "if he saw a ghost of a chance for getting away again."

"But, they tell me the camp is now policed."

"So it is."

"Then, if he knows that, I do not think there is any danger of his coming. I think he would be a fool to do so."

"He is a very dare-devil, though. You must know that, if you have heard all of his doings here. He has robbed and murdered right and left."

"You are talking now of the highwayman," put in Pearsman.

"I am talking about John Heathcote," was the retort. "I hold that he and the outlaw are one."

"I admit that Heathcote is outlawed, and that there is a price on his head, but I do not admit that he is the man who has been doing all these evils."

"Have you proof to the contrary?"

"No."

"Then your opinion has little weight with me. Knowing what I know of the scamp, I speak from positive knowledge. I do not believe there is any crime too great for John Heathcote."

"It will not do for you and me to argue on that point, Mayor Millfield."

"Why not?"

"We are both too positive."

"I have grounds, sir, while you have none."

"Let us say no more about it. It is better so, since we cannot agree."

"You admit that he murdered Kinross, don't you?"

"It would be to call you a perjurer not to believe that, sir. The law calls him guilty, and I would not dispute with the law."

"Then, if guilty of that, why not of all the other crimes?"

"No reason why not from your point of view."

"While from your own?"

"From mine there may be good reasons. I will not discuss the matter further at this time."

Millfield was somewhat flushed with rising anger, but the detective was cool and calm in manner.

The others were looking on and listening to the argument.

Royal Jim joined them.

"Disputing over me?" he asked.

"No," answered Millfield, "but about Genteel Jim."

"Then you accept my statement that I am not that fellow, and that I know nothing about him?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am glad you do, for, on my word of honor, I am not the man. If I look like him that is my misfortune, I suppose. But, let me have a little time and I'll prove to the satisfaction of all who and what I am."

His statement was accepted, since no one could disprove it, and since the men who had brought the suspicion upon him could not support their charge.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A SUSPICION SPOKEN OF.

IT was on the following morning that Detective Pearsman found a sealed note awaiting him at the office of the hotel when he went down.

On opening it he was somewhat surprised. The signature was that of Genteel John.

"Who left this note here for me?" he asked of the clerk.

"I don't know," was the reply.

"Don't know?"

"No, sir."

"And how is that?"

"Because I did not see who left it. I found it here on the desk, and that is all I know about it."

"When did you find it?"

"This morning when I opened up."

"Well, it is strange, that's all."

"Something to surprise you?"

"Rather. Did Royal Jim spend the night here?"

"I suppose so. He is booked, anyhow. Guess he is not up yet."

The detective went out to the piazza, where he read the note over again, and several times.

It was like this:

"DETECTIVE PEARSMAN:—

"Glad to know you still believe me innocent. Do not be deceived. Royal Jim and I are far different persons. Hold no suspicion against him. I am not idle. I may put important clues into your hands before long. You need not search for me, for I think my identity is well-concealed. Miss Cantril is aware that I am here. She received a communication from me last night. I am not the murderer and outlaw who is using my name, as I scarcely need assure you.

"Sincerely yours,

"JOHN HEATHCOTE."

"This is remarkable," the detective said to himself. "Were this to fall into the hands of Joyce, he would take it as additional proof that Royal Jim is the man.

"Why?"

"Because he is here at the hotel, and the wording of it might be construed as having only the one object of diverting suspicion from him. Yes, he would take it as strong proof, while I do not."

He was thoughtful.

"I will show this to Joyce," he finally decided. "That is, minus one little clause, which I will cut out now."

Taking his knife, he cut out the two sentences referring to Miss Cantril, leaving all the rest of the note as it was. The pieces cut out he chewed to pulp, that he might destroy them utterly.

About the time he had done that, Joyce appeared.

They greeted as usual.

"Well, what is the word?" Joyce asked.

"Genteel John is in town."

"What?"

The calm statement had the effect of an exploding bomb upon the unsuspecting Joyce.

"Just as I tell you."

"How do you know he is here?"

"I have heard from him."

"Well, is it Royal Jim?"

"Hardly."

"Who?"

"I don't know."

"But, you said he had communicated with you."

"And that is all."

"You have not seen him?"

"No."

"Then you are no better off than you were before."

"Except that I now know he is here. He may be a laborer in the mines, or a teamster, or anything like that. There is a big population here, you are aware, and it is impossible to do with every man as Playfair and his partner did with Royal Jim last night."

"What had he to say to you?"

"I intend to tell you that, or I would not have told anything about it at all. Here is the note he left for me."

With that he put the note into Joyce's hands. That detective read it with avidity, but looked up with disappointment.

"You have cut something out," he said.

"Nothing that interferes with the reading as it is, however."

"But something you did not want me to see."

"Yes."

"Well, it was your message. Do you know what I think about it?"

"I want to know, and that is one reason why I have allowed you to see it. Let me have your opinion of it."

"I think it is proof further that Royal Jim and Genteel John are one and the same."

Pearsman smiled.

"Why do you think that?"

"Can't you see?"

"Hardly."

"Well, it strikes me that this is a poor attempt to divert attention from the gambling sport."

"And you think he himself, being Genteel John, is the one who left it at the hotel for me?"

"Yes. He could easily do it."

"I admit that; but, you are willing to admit that Genteel John has shown some ability as a detective. I may say unusual ability."

"Yes, with a purpose, he has."

"Yes, with a purpose. Very well. Being something of a detective himself, is it likely that he would do such a thing as this? He would

know it would only draw all the more attention upon him."

"Then you begin to believe as I do?"

"Not a bit; I was only taking your point of view for the moment."

"He has been foolish enough to think otherwise, anyhow, it seems."

"Then you cast your vote with Playfair and Raynold, do you?"

"I believe they were on the right track."

"And that Royal Jim and Genteel John are one."

"How can I help believing it?"

"I don't find it hard to think otherwise. This note is genuine, Mr. Joyce, and it speaks the truth. Depend upon it. This is from the true Genteel John, and he is not Royal Jim, whoever else he may be."

"Your mind is fixed on that."

"Firmly."

"Maybe there was additional proof in these words which you have cut out."

"No; you have seen all that was worth seeing."

"Yet this other was worth cutting out."

"Because it gave me a clue which I would not share with you."

"A clue to what?"

"Possibly to the identity of Genteel John in his present guise."

"Hal! no wonder you cut it out, then. Now, that is something definite. If you have some proof that this Royal Jim is not the outlaw, that alters the case."

"I have no proof of that. All I say is, that he is not John Heathcote. You must not lose sight of the fact that I hold that there are two Genteel Johns in the field now."

"It is useless to talk with you, I see, since we can never come to any agreement or understanding."

"Which is not my fault, Joyce," laughing. "I have been trying hard enough to convert you from the error of your way, you know."

"The blind trying to lead the blind."

"Look at it that way if you please."

"I am obliged to. By the way, you have not mentioned this note to any one else, have you?"

"No."

"Do you intend to do so?"

"No."

"Good. I will give more attention to Royal Jim, while you are looking around on your new clue, whatever it may be."

"You are at liberty to make any use you see fit of the revelation I have made to you. Genteel John is here, and if you can take him you will do well. As for me, I am not working against him, but for him."

"In the face of the law?"

"In the face of men, devils, and everything else."

"You cannot surely mean to say that you believe him innocent altogether, do you?"

"That is just what I do believe, Joyce."

"The deuce! You can't mean it."

"I swear I do."

"Why, man, that is to say that Osmond Millfield is nothing more or less than a vile perjurer!"

"I can't help that; I have spoken my firm conviction."

"You are more of a puzzle to me than ever, now."

"See here, Joyce."

"Well?"

"In spite of the difference between us, that is, our difference of opinion in regard to this case, I still acknowledge that you are a detective of no mean ability and as such I am talking to you now."

"Glad of your good opinion. I feared you thought me little better than an ass, at our last meeting."

"That was talk."

"So is this."

"But, there is a difference. I am going to put you on your guard in one direction."

"And what direction is that?"

"Do not let Mayor Millfield make a tool of you; that is the point. Look out for him, and bear in mind the suspicion I have whispered in your ear. Of course you will not repeat that."

"Certainly not; but it is hard to understand. Why, think of his reputation, of his standing—"

"And you, think of what I have said and beware. No more now; we are interrupted. Here comes your suspected man."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BY THE SECRET HAND.

It was on that same morning that there was surprise in the Lyndon cottage.

The colonel was the first of the family to rise, and when he went down, one of the servants handed him a sealed note.

"Where did you get this?" the colonel asked.

"It was on the piazza when I opened the door, sir," was the response.

"And you are not aware who left it there?"

"No, sir."

"It is damp. It has probably been there all night."

"I think it has been there some time, sir. It was that way when I found it."

The colonel went into the library.

He thought he recognized the hand, and did not want to open the missive in the presence of any one.

It was, he believed, from Genteel John.

And he was not mistaken. On tearing it open he read:

"MY BEST OF FRIENDS:—

"I am again here at Daisy Drift. I am making progress. Ere long the mystery will be cleared. For the present I must remain unknown to you. You may show this to Jackson. I write more especially to advise you not to close your deal with Mr. Pathfinder, for awhile. Wait till you hear from me again. You can put it off, and at the same time detain him with you. Be blind to his faults. Do not let him know of this note from me.

"Yours in secret,

"JOHN."

"What is the meaning of this, I wonder?" the colonel questioned. "He tells me to delay closing with Pathfinder. Why? It puzzles me. And I am to be blind to his faults. Well, he has faults, that is true, for he is not like he used to be some years ago."

He paced the floor with the note in his hand.

Busy with his thoughts, the time passed quickly, and the rest of the household were astir before he roused out of his reverie.

And then it was the entrance of Jackson that brought him out of his deep day-dream.

"What's the matter, father?" the young man asked.

"Close the door, Jack," was the response. "I have something to show you."

The son obeyed, and stepped forward.

"What is it?"

"This letter."

"Where did you get it?"

"Susan found it on the piazza this morning."

"Who is the writer? Is it anonymous?"

"No; it's from John."

"From John?"

The young man had taken the note from his father's hand, and he now opened it with eager haste.

"So John is here?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, he is here."

"And you do not know in what guise?"

"I do not."

"Can it be possible that he and the gambler sport are one, as so many seem to suspect?"

"I have been trying to study that out. I think not. I have been over the entire village, in mind, and I cannot fix upon a single person upon whom my suspicions will fasten."

"Perhaps he is one of these detectives, playing that role in order to escape attention."

"I think not."

"Why?"

"There are no strangers among them."

"They are all strangers to us."

"In one sense, so they are; but, they were all here when John was last seen here."

"That is so, come to think of it."

"And there are no new faces at the mines, nor can I think of one anywhere to whom suspicion will cling."

"Have you thought of that stranger at the hotel?"

"Which one?"

"Johnston Rainhard."

"Yes; but it is impossible he can be our John."

"Why?"

"No mortal man could take on a disguise that would change so completely his every characteristic."

"Not even Genteel John?"

"Not even him."

"But, Pearsman has said of him that he is a great detective, and he ought to be a judge."

"Not great enough for that, however. Why, this man's face is not the same in general contour. There is a difference not to be mistaken."

"Well, I cannot argue against your view, for there is little to argue from. But, if not that man, then you name one."

"That, I have told you, I cannot do."

"And we may as well give it up, then."

"I think so. He will reveal himself to us all in good time. It will be of no use to try to discover his identity, for he is playing to deceive the detectives, and he would certainly baffle our search."

"Then, it is not necessary that we should know him."

"True. I did debate whether it could be that he and the young Englishman were one and the same, but I decided against it."

"Certainly. That is even a wilder shot than my own. As you have said about Rainhard, no mortal could make such a change in his appearance and escape detection so well."

"You are right. Then, there is his trunk, which we have seen."

"That's so, I had forgotten that. It bears his initials, and is stamped all over with tabs which attest its foreign travel. There could not be any counterfeiting that."

"No; the most likely person is this gambler whom the others suspect, and he is at the same time the most unlikely. But, let it pass. What do you think of what he has to say about our guest from Chicago?"

"I am trying to think what to think, if you

can understand any such paradoxical lingo as that, father. He must have some good reason for what he advises."

"We know John well enough to believe that."

"And this note is a puzzle as well as a surprise. There is only one thing we can do."

"And that is—"

"To wait and see what will come of it all."

"Perhaps John will see fit to reveal himself to us soon," the colonel observed.

"Perhaps," agreed the son, "and yet it is hardly probable that he will take the risk, either. To be discovered would be to ruin his life."

"That's so, for, proscribed and hounded as he is, he could do nothing but fly for his life. If they capture him before he gets evidence to clear himself, he will surely hang."

"And innocently."

"Yes, innocently; for we know John Heathcote is no murderer."

"Would that we had some means of proving Millfield false, as he certainly is if our confidence John is not misplaced."

"That will come, be sure of it. John's first move was enough to prove him guiltless. A guilty man would have seized the opportunity to make good his escape out of the country."

"I agree with you," said Jackson. "There is deep mystery here, father, and I am eager to see it cleared away. Poor John! he has suffered."

"We well know that, by our own suffering. Poor Nydia!"

They bowed their heads in silence.

"By the way, father," Jackson next spoke, "have you ever been able to learn who the woman was who helped John to escape?"

"Never."

"That was not the least mysterious thing about the case."

"Not by any means. The belief is that it was the person who killed Kinross, or who had some knowledge of it."

"And who would not see an innocent person hang for the crime?"

"Perhaps that; though there might have been some other consideration as well to lead to the result."

"However that might be, the result was favorable to John."

"Yes," agreed the colonel. "And yet, it would have been better for him could the other plan have been successful first."

"Why?"

"Because, as we have seen before, it places him under some obligation to the woman, and if he finds she is the guilty one, he will not feel like dragging her to the gallows since she risked herself to save him."

"That is so, but he cannot let that stand in the way of clearing himself of the crime. The guilty one ought to suffer."

"Then, too, John has only the one motive, that of clearing himself. He has no thought of seeking to avenge the death of his hated stepfather. He would be more than human to care anything for that."

"He certainly would."

It was while they were talking that Mrs. Lyndon entered in an excited way.

"Mark," she addressed the colonel, "Mr. Pathfinder has been robbed."

"What?"

The question came from father and son together.

"Yes, robbed. But, here he comes himself, and you will hear it from his own lips."

"It seems impossible," cried the guest, as he rushed into the room, pale and excited. "Nevertheless, it is the fact. My bill-book, with money and papers, is gone. I can't understand it."

"Has your room been entered?" asked the colonel.

"I can't explain it in any other way. The window was open, you know."

"This is strange. It is the first time anything of the sort has happened in this place. Let's go up there and look about."

They went immediately to the room of their guest, where he explained where he had put his valuables on retiring, and it seemed plain if they had been taken from that room, the robber had entered by the window.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ANOTHER AND SIMILAR CASE.

It did not take long to convince the colonel and his son that they were not likely to make any headway with this mystery unaided.

Their guest had certainly been relieved of his money and papers, and the open window suggested the means by which the robber had gained entrance; but that was all they could determine.

"Suppose we call in Pearsman," suggested Jackson.

"A good idea," the colonel agreed.

"Capital!" cried the guest. "My papers must be recovered if possible, or I am in a bad situation."

"Were they very valuable?"

"I came prepared to close the deal for the mine."

"Then your papers must be found. But, the robber cannot use them, can he?"

"He can if he can get them off his hands before I give the alarm, by simply forging my name to them."

"Hal then if they are not signed the case is not so bad. It is not likely a robber could successfully imitate your signature, is it?"

"Maybe not; but I do not feel safe with those papers out of my hands."

"Of course not. Well, we'll call Pearsman."

The detective was sent for.

"You want me here, gentlemen?" he asked, when he entered the cottage.

He cast a sweeping glance about him, as if to try to read what was wanted of him before it was made known.

"Yes, we want you," answered the colonel.

"We have a case for you."

"A case?"

"Yes."

The colonel then stated briefly what was required.

"Let me see the room," the detective requested.

They repaired to the room once more, and Pathfinder told his story again.

"The stage is gone," mused the detective. "I was on hand when it left, however, and I can find no suspicion against any of the passengers. I am inclined to believe the robber is still here in the camp."

"Then can you find him?" asked the victim, eagerly.

"It may puzzle me considerably. You see, he has left no clue."

"But I'll post a reward, and that may bring him."

"Not likely. These rewards do not bring a robber back again when he has once got safely off."

"I'll promise he won't be detained, if he will only give up the papers. He may keep the money, only a couple of hundred or so."

"That is an old bait. It won't work."

"Yet the robber may be a green hand, and may fall into it."

"Nothing of the sort here. Whoever it was took your money and papers knew what he was about. But you are doubly sure you had the pocketbook when you retired?"

"I am. I had it out at the Paris Salon, and returned it to my inside pocket, where I always carry it. When I retired I opened it again to make sure everything was all right."

"And then you hung your vest there in the closet, the pocketbook in it, eh?"

"Yes, and I can swear to it."

"Well, your word is positive enough on that point, and it follows that your money was taken from you in this room. And the window shows how."

"Yes, it seems plain enough."

"But it is not so plain who the robber was."

"That's so."

"Now, there were, at first, two ways for you to deal with this thing."

"And what were they?"

"First, to say nothing about it, but wait and watch for chance to indicate a suspicion against some one."

"And the other?"

"Post a reward and work the case openly."

"And why are not these two ways open yet?" asked the colonel.

"Because, if the robber is still here, as I suspect, he has seen me come here and will know what I have come for. And the more certainly if he saw that a servant came for me."

"Then it is narrowed to the last plan."

"Yes; but, that may be worked with a little skill. You tell me your watch and other valuables have not been disturbed."

"Nothing but the pocketbook."

"Then you will word the placard like this: 'A suitable reward will be given for the return of the watch and chain stolen from me last night, and no questions asked.' And to that you will sign your name."

"But, I have my watch; it's the papers I want."

"Put your watch out of sight, and say nothing about the pocketbook. The man who took that knows you have lost it. It will puzzle him to know how your watch was taken, for he must have noticed that it was in your vest when he took the pocketbook."

"That's so, by George!"

"But, what end will that serve?" asked Jack Lyndon.

"I may be able to detect the thief by watching those who observe the poster."

"Hal! I see."

"And is that all that can be done?" asked the colonel.

"No, not quite. We can post a few trusted ones, on the sly, to have an eye out for the pocketbook."

"That's so."

"Describe the article, Mr. Pathfinder."

"Well, it was an old pocketbook, badly worn at the corners, and marked on the inside with two big initials—J. and P."

"The same old pocketbook you used to carry?" queried the colonel.

"Yes, the same old one, Mark."

"Then it must be an aged affair by this time, I should say."

"And it is."

The detective gathered what further points he could and took his leave, while the family turned their attention to breakfast.

Pearsman returned to the hotel.

There he was met by Joyce, on the piazza.

They greeted as usual, when Joyce said:

"Well, here's another mystery, Pearsman."

"What's that?"

The Government Detective did not see how Joyce could have heard about the matter at the Lyndon cottage, yet he was in doubt when he heard the answer to his question.

"Robbery," the answer was.

"Where?"

"Here."

"In the hotel?"

"Exactly; though it does not show that it has been the work of Genteel John this time."

"Who's the victim?"

"Mrs. Rainhard."

"What's missing?"

"Money and papers, she claims."

"Any clue?"

"No."

Pearsman was thoughtful for a moment.

Could it be that the same person had committed both robberies?

It had that appearance, certainly. The same articles had been taken in both instances.

"Anything else taken?" he asked.

"No; not even watch and jewelry, which lay in open sight."

Here, again, the cases were similar. Why had these two persons alone been the only victims selected?

Could it be that there was something in common between Mrs. Rainhard and Mr. Pathfinder? They both claimed to be from Chicago.

If so, then had not the thief some especial object in view when he robbed them of papers? It did look that way, and there might be something in it. He did not mention the other case to Joyce.

"Well, what do you think of it?" Joyce asked impatiently.

"Why, it would look as if there was an especial object in taking the papers. Did she tell you what they were?"

"Only in a general way. You look at it the same as I do. But, there is no clue, not the slightest. I am at loss where to look."

"What are you going to do?"

"I am to remain out of sight, as it were, and the woman will have the landlord post a reward for the recovery of the papers."

"And you will look out in a general way for somebody to suspect, eh?"

"Yes."

"That plan may work. You do not think this has been the doings of Genteel John, do you?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Well, because the game is too small, for one thing."

"That is it, exactly. I am glad we agree upon one point, at any rate, Joyce."

"Yes, there is some satisfaction in that, sure enough. I wish we could only agree upon other points as well. But, here is a thought for you."

"Let's have it."

"Do you imagine that this robbery has anything to do with the fact that Genteel John was here last night, as his note to you proves?"

"It may and it may not. You can depend on it that John Heathcote is not the robber, though."

"But Genteel John may have been?"

"John the False, yes."

"Yes; but you just agreed with me that the game was too small for him."

"He may have had some pressing reason for wanting to get hold of papers the woman had in her possession."

"And that is to intimate that Mrs. Rainhard may not be just what she seems, I take it."

"It is possible that she may be anything else. Since you are interested in her case, you have a chance for looking around, and if there is a skeleton anywhere, drag it out."

"There are a good many skeletons around, Pearsman. This case seems to be unusually full of them. The only trouble is, they are invisible ones."

"They will appear when John Heathcote has completed his work."

CHAPTER XXX.

FOND MOTHER AND DUTIFUL SON.

WHEN two offers of reward appeared about the same time, for thefts, the curiosity of Daisy Drift was aroused.

There was much comment as to who the robber could have been, and many were of the opinion that Genteel John was around again.

There were many others, however, who took the opposite view, thinking it impossible, since the outlaw would never bother with game so very small.

Besides these two classes, there was the very,

very small majority who were firmly of the opinion that Genteel John had had nothing to do with it, even if it had been done by his double, or the fellow who was passing under his name.

These, of course, meant John Heathcote, and were his friends.

In the case of Mrs. Rainhard there was something peculiar, something which she did not make known to her detective.

Shortly after the reward had been posted her son visited her room.

He had been requested to do so.

"What's this I hear?" he greeted. "That you have been robbed?"

"You need not pretend that you know nothing about it," was the cool response. "Just hand over those papers."

"Heavens! you don't think I robbed you!"

"I know you did."

"Ha, ha, ha! Well, you know more than I know myself, then, that is all."

"You have seen me have considerable of money in my possession, and last evening you learned by accident where I kept it and my papers."

The son looked at the mother with wonder expressed upon his face.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I learned nothing of the kind. I was at the Paris Salon last evening, as you know."

The woman gave a sarcastic sneer.

"What does your word amount to?" she demanded.

"On my word of honor—"

"Ha, ha, ha! That is too good! Ha, ha, ha! Why, what honor is there in a man like you?"

"Well, I can't convince you that way, but I'll swear that you are mistaken as to my learning anything about the hiding-place of your boodle. Besides, I didn't see you last night."

"You are a fool, or you take me for one, which is it?"

"Neither."

"It is one or the other, and I think the latter. But, you are mistaken if that is your estimate of me. Perhaps you will tell me you were not here in this room at half-past ten, and that you did not receive some money from me for—"

"I do say so," the man interrupted. "What cursed mystery is here, anyhow? I have received no money from you."

"You lie."

"That is right to the point, but you are mistaken this time. I do not lie; I swear it."

"Of what value is your oath?"

"Such as it is, I offer it. I can't do any better."

"You are trying to play double with me. What is the use? Don't you suppose I know when I see you and when I do not?"

"You ought to, but if you say I was here last night at ten-thirty, you are a good deal off. You have dreamed it. I was not here, and that is all there is about it."

"Fool! To think you can make me believe that. Again I demand what you have stolen from me. If you do not surrender it instantly I will—"

"No you won't, either. No threats, now, if you please."

"You are only trying to make me pay you a second time."

"I have not been paid for the first time, yet."

"Fool! Did you not sit right here," indicating, "and did I not take money from my pocketbook, out of that drawer there, and pay you one hundred dollars?"

"You did not."

"Curse you! I say I did!"

"I might return your accusation upon you, and say you are trying to deal double with me to cheat me out of what is due me."

The woman was wild with rage.

"And not satisfied with that," she cried, "you came back here and robbed me of all."

"Did you see me do that, too?"

"No; but it could have been no one else."

"Well, it certainly was some one else, for I did not do it."

The manner of the man was so very earnest that the woman stood before him and looked steadily into his eyes.

He stood the test.

"Are you speaking the truth?" she demanded.

"By Satan and his imps, yes. It would be of no use for me to swear by anything higher."

"You scarcely know anything higher. No matter about that, however. Now, if it was not you who came here, who was it?"

"How should I know?"

"Whoever it was, that person had on your clothes, and was the very counterpart of yourself."

"Then it must have been my ghost. When I came over from the Paris Salon I went at once to my room, and was not out of it again till this morning. This is the truth. It is all I can say."

"Do you ever walk in your sleep?"

"I never caught myself at any such tricks as that."

"You must have done so last night. I can repeat some of your talk to me."

"I'd like to hear it."

"Well, you asked me what luck, and I told you I had had none yet. You said you had been

on the lookout all the time. Then you asked me for a hundred, saying you needed it. I gave it to you, and after a few words more you went out."

"It's all news to me, anyhow."

"I cannot understand it."

"Nor can I."

Both were silent for a time.

"By the way," the woman spoke next, "I have news for you."

"And what is that?"

"Genteel John is here in town."

"Ha! how do you happen to know that?"

"No matter how. It is news to you, then?"

"Yes."

"It is true, and I have seen proof of it. I cannot tell you what the proof is just yet, but you may take my word for it."

"I don't know about taking your word for anything, now."

"Why? Have you not found it reliable, so far?"

"Yes; but when you tell me to my face that I was here last night, when I know well enough I was not, that is enough to make me doubt it."

"And I do tell you you were here, you or your ghost, or—"

"Or, what?" demanded the son.

"Do you think it possible that it can have been a trick of Genteel John's?"

"It was a trick of some sort, that is sure. And, since you ask me this it proves that you are not so positively certain as you were about it."

"It is your persistent denial that makes me doubt, even though I am so sure it was you and no one else."

"Is it not just possible you were dreaming?"

"Pah! no."

"Well, I give it up. And now for your question. And as for it's being a trick of Genteel John's, I don't see how he could impersonate me close enough for you to be deceived. I had rather believe you had dreamed it, or that I had begun to walk in my sleep, as you suggested."

The door opened just then.

It was Frances Cantril who entered the room. She stopped short at the sight of Johnston Rainhard, and restrained the words she had all but uttered.

"Your pardon, Mrs. Rainhard," she said; "I thought you were all alone, or I would have knocked."

The mother and son both laughed.

"My dear son and I are as one," the woman hastened to say. "Do not mind him, but come in at any time when the door is open."

"But, it was not open."

"It was not locked, that was what I meant." "And when I find it locked, then I am to stay out, eh?"

"That would be a gentle hint, I should think," spoke up the son.

"Well, I will accept it as a hint. But, Mrs. Rainhard, I have just heard you were robbed last night. Is it true?"

She was assured on the point, and the particulars were told.

"How remarkable!" the young woman exclaimed. "But, you surely must have been dreaming, Mrs. Rainhard, for what earthly object could your own son have in robbing you? That is ridiculous, surely."

"It puzzles me, Miss Cantril."

"Well, have you heard that Mr. Lyndon was robbed last night, too?"

"Mr. Lyndon?"

"Well, rather his guest, Mr. Pathfinder. Yes; there is a notice up, saying he was robbed of his watch and chain."

The woman looked at her son.

"You did not tell me about this," she said.

"That is so, for it was knocked out of me when you accused me as you did. I meant to tell you."

"Perhaps you had a hand in that, even if you did not commit the theft here."

"No, I had not. What a sweet opinion you have of your son!"

"Very, indeed, I should think," added Miss Cantril.

All three laughed.

"What do you know about what is thought of that other theft, then?"

"Nothing," answered the son.

"They are very reticent about it," added Miss Cantril.

There was some further talk, of no very interesting moment, when the young woman took her leave again.

It was then that mother and son entered upon a discussion of some length and considerable importance. Both were earnest, and each was determined.

"We understand each other, then," said the mother in conclusion. "We have reason to believe we have been overreached by Genteel John. We must find him out, and then his life must pay for it all. Do well your part, and your reward is sure."

"You need have no fear on my account, adored mother," was the response.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE WARNING SOUNDED.

THE Mayor of Daisy Drift was a little later

than usual at his office on this morning of which we write.

He was interested in the robberies which had taken place, and had been talking with different individuals concerning them.

His man Sparkers was with him.

"It is something mysterious, to say the least," the mayor growled.

"There must be another thief in town, I should say," Sparkers offered in the way of explanation.

"There is one person too many in town, and that one is Genteel John."

"I agree with you there, boss."

"And it will not be good for his health if we find him out, you can just put that down for a fact."

"I have got it down, hard and fast."

"We will make him sick. But, the deuce of it is, who is he? What guise is he in?"

"That is the puzzle."

"It seems strange that none of the boys are able to get onto him."

"He is all that Pearsman has said of him as a detective, and maybe a good deal more besides."

Both were silent, having reached the office door.

"I'll tell you what it is, Joel," and the mayor paused with the key in his hand. "I begin to have some fear of this fellow. If we don't dump him he is going to dump us."

"He won't dump me, you can bet on that."

"Why?"

"Because, if it comes to a pinch and I find I'm on the dump, I'll light out."

"That might be easy for you, but not for me. My interests tie me right here, you see. And so do yours, too."

"How?"

"Your hundred a week is here."

"Oh! that could be sent to me just as well."

"Not by a big sight. If you want the honey you have got to take your share of the stings."

"Well, we're crossin' the bridge 'fore we come to it, this way. We'll try to get in our lick first, and that will tell the tale."

"Nothing else will tell the tale, as you express it, either."

The mayor opened the door, now, and they went in.

As they entered, the mayor stooped and picked up something from the floor, uttering an exclamation as he did so.

"What is it?" asked Sparkers.

"A letter, I guess, and it has been put in under the door."

The mayor took his seat at the desk and proceeded to open the missive at once, for it was addressed to him.

He had already suspected what it meant, for he had recognized the handwriting as the same as that of a letter which he had received from Denver, which has been shown in a preceding chapter.

As he read the letter his face paled.

"Who's it from?" asked Sparkers.

"From Genteel John."

"Then he is here, sure enough."

"Yes."

"What's he?"

"Give attention and I'll read it to you."

"Let 'er go."

The mayor read aloud in a low tone as follows:

"PERJURER MILLFIELD:—

"Yet a little longer, and the blow falls. I have not forgotten you. Your false oath came near costing me my life, and you shall suffer for it. I am here near you, and there can be no escape for you. Do not try it, neither you nor your tool, Sparkers. You are under watch, night and day. Not only do I avenge your perjury, but the death of my wife as well, for only for you she would now be alive and well. Yours with undying hatred,

"JOHN HEATHCOTE."

"Whew!" whistled Sparkers.

"Pretty strong, isn't it?"

"I should say so."

"And what is going to be done?"

"What can be done, if we can't find the man?"

"That's the question."

Both were thoughtful, and a good deal troubled over the matter.

That there was danger for them they well knew, yet they knew not how to guard against it.

"We can't do anything but wait for him to show his hand," declared Sparkers.

"And he dare not do that, yet. This may be only a bluff game, Sparkers, and only to worry us."

"Wants us to do somethin' that will give him a hold upon us, eh, mayor?"

"That's it."

"Well, if he holds his hand in his pocket till we do that, it will grow fast there, I'm thinking."

"You are right it will. But, is there no way we can find out who he is, and do him up? We are not safe while he is out of jail."

"I don't know how to go to work at all."

"We have been on the watch all the time, it's true, and I'll be hanged if we have found any one to suspect since that letter came from Denver. That fellow is the deuce."

"You forget Royal Jim."

"No, I don't."

"But you have given him up, eh?"

"Yes, I have made up my mind that he is not the man."

Again they were thoughtful.

"Well, mayor, what is going to be done?" Sparkers asked.

"I'll tell you, Joel."

"Well?"

"We must stand our ground and fight it out."

"Sure."

"For, if we run away that will show a weak hand. Besides, we are warned not to try it. He may have men to shoot us down."

"It's pleasant to think of, I'll be hanged if it isn't."

"And the thing we must do," the mayor went on, "is to make our position as secure as possible. We'll post some of the men, those we can best trust, and have them on the watch all the time."

"They are watching now."

"You don't quite understand me."

"Maybe I don't."

"I mean, they must act as a sort of body-guard to me."

"Oh! I see."

"And then it won't be so easy for Genteel John to get at me, you see."

"I see; but where do I come in?"

"You? you'll be one of the guard, of course."

"That is to say, you are the one to be protected, while I must take the chances, eh?"

"It will be the same for you as for me."

"In your mind."

"Well, whether it will or not, you are interested in my welfare to the amount of a hundred a week, and that ought to be worth something to you."

"We won't quarrel about it."

They talked on, arranging their plans, which we need not dwell upon, till at length they were interrupted by the entrance of the two detectives, Playfair and Raynold.

"Well, what word do you bring?" asked the mayor.

Both answered together:

"We have had a surprise."

"What was it?"

"Communications from Genteel John."

"The deuce!"

"That is what he is," declared Raynold.

"What had he to say to you?"

"Tells us to set our minds at rest regarding Royal Jim."

"That he is not the man, eh?"

"Exactly."

"Well, I have just heard from him, too. He is defiant, and threatens all sorts of dire calamities to me and the town."

"And what is your opinion about it?"

"He seems to mean business."

"I mean about his not being Royal Jim."

"Why, I think we made a mistake there. I am inclined to accept his word, as I have just told Sparkers here."

"Yet it is plain that he is here in the town, or was here during the night, at any rate."

"There is no doubting it."

"And you say he threatens?"

"Terribly. He threatens robbery, murder, and everything else that is evil. He undoubtedly has a big following to back him up."

"You think so?"

"Did not his robbery of the Express wagon prove it?"

"Yes; but it did not seem likely that he would venture here again with his band, when so many traps have been laid to catch him."

"I cannot say, of course, but he is a desperate man and a daring one. He is not the man to stop at anything. He is an outlaw of the worst sort, and all this talk about his innocence is both!"

"Oh! we believe that fast enough."

"It has been proved against him in a way that ought to satisfy any one, and the man who can think any other way is a fool. Why, to do so is the same as calling me a perjurer. I think I could make some of them sweat for it, if I had a mind to take it up."

"Why don't you?"

"I question whether it would be worth while to notice them. The truth will come out some day, and then they will hang their heads."

CHAPTER XXXII.

A WEDDING IN THE SALON.

TIME passed.

In spite of his warnings, Genteel John did not act.

The detectives were at loss to account for his silence and inactivity, for they had expected him to move immediately.

Nor could they find out who he was.

They had now searched the camp over and over again, and were positive that there was not a suspected man within its borders.

Strangers arrived from time to time, but they were quickly noted and a decision rendered respecting them.

Royal Jim had brought evidence, by this time, to prove who and what he was, and such proofs as were not to be doubted.

Who, then, could be Genteel John?

It came to be believed at last that he was not in the place at all, and that perhaps he had not been there.

It was known that he had some friends there, and it was thought that maybe one of these had been acting for him.

Be that as it might, John himself did not appear.

And it was the boast of Mayor Millfield and others that he would never dare to show his face there again.

Many weeks had now slipped by, and the excitement of past events was all over, and the village camp was going on in its easy and prosperous way.

A retrospective glance is necessary just here.

Neither Mr. Judson Pathfinder nor Mrs. Rainhard had heard anything of the articles that had been stolen from their rooms on that night, as has been told in full. Their offer of rewards was of no use. It brought them nothing.

These two were still there, the one at the Lyndon cottage and the other at the hotel with her son.

Miss Cantril, too, was yet in the village, as was also the young Englishman whom she had made the effort to win.

Since their last lengthy interview they had been little to each other.

Beginning with the next day, Miss Cantril had given Mr. Poke the cold shoulder, and he had taken it without a murmur.

She had, however, acted upon his advice, and had pushed her acquaintance with Mr. Pathfinder.

Of that we have more to say.

The Lyndons were still at their cottage, although, had it not been for the note the colonel had received from Genteel John, he would ere this have closed with Mr. Pathfinder and moved away.

Daisy Drift was not what it had been to the family, since the death of the still deeply mourned daughter.

Pathfinder was still there, as said, but his presence had become almost unbearable.

The colonel often declared that he was not the Pathfinder he had once known him. He had changed, and for the worse. His tastes had become vulgar, and, had it not been for the request John Heathcote had made, he would ere this have been shown that he was welcome no longer.

Mayor Millfield had dismissed the body-guard which, for some time, he had had with him constantly.

He expressed the belief that Genteel John had disappeared for good and all, and that it was folly to pay further heed to the threats he had made.

Some of the detectives had grown weary, and had taken their leave.

Pearson and Joyce, however, still held on, the latter only because the former did, however.

Raynold and Playfair were among those who had departed. Since their mistake in arresting Royal Jim, the town had not been a pleasant abiding-place for them, and, after standing it as long as they could, they had left.

The Paris Salon was still flourishing.

It had taken root right at the start, and had grown in favor immensely.

Queen Ethel was the chief attraction, of course, and it being now known that she was heart and fancy free, many were her admirers.

Gore, the Giant, had returned just once to get even with Royal Jim, but he had not made another attempt. The gambler sport had attended to him so thoroughly on that occasion that he was more than satisfied.

Only a hog would want more, the giant had declared.

Among the admirers of the queenly Ethel were Johnston Rainhard and E. Garnet Poke.

These had come to be something of rivals, thought to this time there had been no outbreak between them.

They were frequently at her table, where they vied with each other for her favor. At such times, however, she showed no more favor to one player than to another.

Not only had the Paris Salon become popular with the male portion of the people, but with the female as well. Ladies from the hotel were present at the games every evening.

The best of order was maintained, and the place was noted for the respectable character it had.

Among the attendants of this sort were Miss Cantril and Mrs. Rainhard.

They were there frequently, and not infrequently they played.

The place provided good music, and that, the women declared, was the attraction which drew them.

But, in the case of Frances Cantril, it was whispered that she was there because there she most frequently found Mr. Pathfinder.

And of these two, as said before, we have more to say.

Daisy Drift was in something of a suppressed excitement of expectancy, owing to the announcement of a wedding.

And that wedding was to be that of Miss Cantril to Pathfinder.

The young adventuress had played well her hand, and had won. The ambition of her life was about to be realized, and that was, marriage to a rich man.

The preparations had all been quietly made, and there was to be nothing of the display that had been made on the occasion of her other wedding there at Daisy Drift. That was not to be imitated.

The only extra plan that had been laid was that the marriage was to take place in the Paris Salon.

This was done to give everybody a chance to be present, since this was the largest room in the camp by long odds.

The local newspaper had been the first to make the news public, and while it congratulated both the bride and the groom, it offered a hope that this union might be happier in its results than the other had been.

The evening of the wedding was now at hand. On that morning Pathfinder had taken leave of the Lyndon cottage.

The cloud that had been hovering there had not broken, quite, but it had lowered till its chilling influence had become unbearable.

The marriage could not be spoken well of by the Lyndons, owing to the unpleasant story that had been told of Miss Cantril by Genteel John. To her, since they had to believe that story, they laid the loss of their daughter.

They, of course, would not attend the wedding, nor could their guest hope to introduce his bride to them.

Hence, one reason, the separation.

The wedding was to take place early in the evening, when the bride and groom would receive their friends for an hour at the salon.

Pathfinder had become in a way popular at the camp, and as Miss Cantril had lived down the story concerning herself, the wedding was an affair of no mean importance in the village camp.

The hour set found the Paris Salon well filled.

The dais usually occupied by Queen Ethel was to be the place occupied by the happy couple.

Miss Cantril regretted that her mother could not be present, but she had corresponded with her, she said, and had her approval and blessing upon her choice.

In the absence of her mother, Mrs. Rainhard had taken upon herself the office of chaperon.

There had been some difficulty at first about procuring a minister to perform the ceremony.

Daisy Drift had now two resident preachers, but both of these had refused to perform the service, owing to the fact that it was to take place in the salon.

This was a place they would in no wise countenance.

The difficulty had been overcome, though, by engaging Justice Russet for the occasion.

Queen Ethel had consented to act as bride's-maid, while Johnston Rainhard had succeeded in gaining the post of honor as best man.

This was owing to the fact, it was believed, that the young Englishman had been too slow and had allowed the chance to slip through his fingers.

Promptly at the time appointed, the bridal party filed into the salon and advanced to the dais at the rear to the tune of a wedding march played by the pianist and other musicians.

When they had reached their places the music stopped, and at once the justice performed his part and soon pronounced the two man and wife.

Then followed the congratulations.

The party retained their places on the dais, and the crowd pressed forward to shake hands with them.

With the crowd was one personage who soon began to attract attention by the peculiarity of his attire, which looked more like a stage costume.

There was, first, a black hat of unusual width of brim, then a broad, black cape; and under that a black coat that reached nearly to the floor. He was, altogether, a peculiar man.

Little of his face was to be seen, and the most prominent thing about it was a great mustache, waxed and stiff, and standing out for several inches on each side. This added even more to his stagey appearance.

By the time he had reached the front, many eyes were upon him, and many were the remarks that were made.

Detective Pearsman and Detective Joyce were standing together.

"Who in creation is that?" asked Joyce.

"I give it up, unless it be Mephistopheles himself."

"He looks enough like him. But may it not be Genteel John, the outlaw?"

"Possibly."

"Thunder, man, suppose it is! How can you take it so quietly?"

"It is nothing to get excited over. If it is Genteel John we shall find it out before long."

"After he has escaped?"

"I have no desire to hinder his escape, as you know."

"Well, I have; and I'll do it, too, if I can, if it proves to be he."

CHAPTER XXXIII.
GENTEEL JOHN APPEARS.

By this time the mysterious stranger had come near to the bride and groom, and the two detectives watched to see what would take place.

In a moment it was his turn to offer congratulations, and taking the hand of the groom, even though Pathfinder tried to avoid him, he said, in a voice loud enough to be heard all over the room:

"Jerry, allow me to congratulate you upon your happy marriage. And you, Mrs. Jerry Tomson, may you know nothing but peace and happiness the rest of your days. You do not recognize me, perhaps, but you are no stranger to me, I assure you. This is a union to do you both proud."

Pathfinder was trying to draw away, his face was pale as death itself, but his hand was held as in a giant's clutch.

The bride was a picture of distress, dismay, dread, everything but what she had been only one brief moment before.

The room was still, and every eye was upon them.

"What do you mean by this insulting language to me?"

So cried Pathfinder, fiercely.

"I mean what I have said, sir," was the response.

"But I want you to understand my name is not Jerry Tomson, but Judson Pathfinder, and I demand my release at once."

"Your name is Jerry Tomson, and you are personating the man whom you murdered and robbed some weeks ago between here and Chicago. You are my prisoner, sir!"

With the words, a pair of handcuffs were snapped onto the man's wrists.

With a moan the bride fell in a faint, Royal Jim catching her.

The crowd was breathless, almost.

Pathfinder staggered, and there came upon his forehead a damp of perspiration, while his face grew even more deathly white than before, if possible. The charge made against him was no trifling one.

"Who—who are you?" the man gasped.

"I am a detective who has been upon your track," was the answer. "Never fear but I have proofs for the charge I have made."

"That you cannot have, for it is false. I am just what I have laid claim to be: Judson Pathfinder, of Chicago. Send for Colonel Lyndon, if you doubt me. I am not dead, I assure you."

"No; but Judson Pathfinder is. You, Jerry Tomson, murdered him. Let Colonel Lyndon be sent for, by all means. It is time that you were exposed, and I am prepared to do it for you. It was the fact that you and Mr. Pathfinder looked much alike that led you into the crime."

"False, false. And, had you no heart, to make this charge at such a time as this? See what you have done to my bride."

"She has only fainted; that will not kill her," was the cold response.

The crowd was beginning to waken out of its spell.

"Who and what are you, sir?" demanded the mayor, sharply, addressing the mysterious detective.

He pressed forward as he spoke.

With a revolver the detective waved him back.

"Stand back," he ordered. "Do not attempt to interfere with me or my prisoner, sir. I will explain all to your satisfaction."

"Be about it, then. You have done a dastardly thing, to make the arrest at this time. If your charge is true, why did you not make the arrest before this ceremony was performed?"

"I am not required to give my reasons to you, sir."

"Do you know who I am?"

"I believe you are mayor of this place, but that is nothing to me. I am not answerable to you for what I do. Keep back, now, sir."

"What do you think now?" detective Joyce had asked of Pearsman.

"I have reason to believe the man is John Heathcote," was the whispered reply.

"Hail for once you agree with me. I am sure it is he, for this is a repetition of what he did once before where Miss Cantril was concerned."

"Exactly. He has just cause for revenge against her."

"Well, he shall not leave this place if I can prevent it. Those rewards shall be mine."

Pearsman laid a hand heavily upon his shoulder.

"Don't forget that I am John Heathcote's friend," he said. "You shall not attempt to detain him."

"What! Do you so far forget yourself?"

"Exactly! You stay here with me, and do not interfere. The man will have his hands full as it is, I think. The mayor must suspect him."

Pearsman was the larger man, and able to enforce his command, and with muttered complaints the younger detective yielded to him. It was a bitter pill for him to swallow.

This interpolated.

"What! do you defy me?" the mayor had meanwhile cried in response to the last remark of the unknown detective. "I'll have you to know that I rule here, sir!"

"You do not rule me. Stand back, now, while I address the people and show the proofs for the accusation I have made against this rascal. After that I will be ready to talk further with you, if necessary."

"I demand to know who you are."

"Your demands are nothing to me. You will learn who I am all in good time."

"You are Genteel John, the outlaw."

"Others have been similarly accused. Do not hinder me now, but hear what I have to say. Stand back, sir!"

With that, the man's revolver came up and took a bead upon the mayor's nose, and he stepped back with somewhat of haste, swearing as he did so.

"Citizens of Daisy Drift," the unknown then spoke, "the charge I have made against this man is true in every particular. His name is Jerry Tomson, and he is a murderer—the murderer of Judson Pathfinder. He came here with stolen papers in his possession and imposed upon Colonel Lyndon."

"You lie, curse you!" the prisoner hoarsely grated.

"I speak but the truth," was the calm rejoinder. "You were once in the employ of Mr. Pathfinder, and might have remained there had you been honest. You were not, and you were dismissed. From that moment you sought revenge. You were often mistaken for Mr. Pathfinder, and that circumstance gave you an idea. You only wanted a good opportunity to usurp his place, putting him out of the way."

"With that object in view, men of Daisy Drift, he studied Mr. Pathfinder closely, and posted himself thoroughly in everything. He had secret means of doing this without danger of detection. He learned of the correspondence from Colonel Lyndon, and when Mr. Pathfinder set out to come here he followed him, and, at a favorable opportunity, murdered him and concealed the body. Then, secure as he thought, he came on and passed himself off as Mr. Pathfinder. Now, I have said nothing that I am not prepared to prove."

"You can't prove it; I defy you to do so."

"Your bluster cannot save you, sir, for I am sure of my ground. Detective Joyce, will you do me the favor to step forward here?"

That gentleman gave a start at the unexpected call.

He went forward, however, with a whispered caution from Pearsman ringing in his ears.

That caution had been, that he must not try, under any circumstances, to detain the daring man who had thus faced the tigers in their den.

"Here, sir, is a prisoner for you," the unknown detective said. "You have been waiting long enough in vain for Genteel John; take this prisoner, and take to yourself the honor of the arrest."

"I prefer not to do so," Joyce parleyed.

"And why?"

"I had rather wait on, in the hope of sooner or later laying hands upon the bigger game."

"Impossible; you can never do that."

"You say so."

"And I am in position to know something about it. You will never take Genteel John, and the sooner you make up your mind to it, the better. Will you take my prisoner off my hands?"

"What's the matter with your keeping him?"

"I have other plans, plans which must not be broken in upon for anything. I must turn the man over to some one, and if you will not take him I must look further."

"Why will you not keep him yourself?"

"You have just heard. Here, sir, are ample proofs for all I have charged, and I leave it for you to deal with him."

"But, who are you?"

He had thrust some papers into Joyce's hand, and had now taken a step backward from where he had stood.

"Mayor, will you now step this way?" he asked.

"I will not," snapped Millfield.

He retreated a step, instead.

"And why not? Surely, you need have nothing to fear from me. Well, no matter; this man will answer the purpose just as well."

As he spoke, he caught hold upon Johnston Rainard, and holding him in front of him with the strength of a giant, backed toward the rear door, his revolver still to the fore.

It required but a few steps to cover the distance.

"Now," he called out, "since you are all eager to know who I am, I will tell you. I am John Heathcote, or Genteel John, the Detective Outlaw; but not the robber and murderer who has been using my name. I bid you good-night."

Pushing Rainard from him, he was gone and the door was closed before any one could think of trying to stop him.

"After him!" thundered the mayor, then.

There was a howl, and a rush was made for the rear door, the mayor in the lead, but that door was found locked.

"The other way!" Millfield cried. "He will escape us yet, if we are not careful! After him! An additional thousand to the man who takes him dead or alive!"

The crowd turned, shouting hoarsely, and a rush was made for the front doors, those who had been in the rear before having decidedly the advantage now. Every man of them, almost, eager to be the one to claim the rewards.

They were out in a brief time, but the man had disappeared.

A frantic figure, however, was rushing down the street toward the salon, crying aloud as he came, in a voice of terror.

There was light enough in the street to discern pretty soon who it was, and it proved to be the young Englishman, E. Garnet Poke, covered with dust and much disordered.

"Save me! Save me!" he was crying aloud. "Do not let 'im carry me off with him! Oh, gentlemen! Good gentlemen! Hi 'ave 'ad the narrowest hescape Hi ever 'ad hin me life! Protect me, Hi beg hof you."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE PRINCE OF DETECTIVES.

"WHAT'S the matter with you, Englishman?"

So demanded one good citizen, as he caught hold of Poke by the collar and brought him to a stop.

"Hi 'ave been boutraged!" was the response, excitedly. "Hi was never so boutraged hin hall me life!"

His "itches" were juggled about regardlessly. In his excitement he seemed to lose all control over that erratic letter. When calm he could manage it.

"What has happened? What's been done to ye?"

"Hoh my, hoh my! Hi 'ardly know what 'as 'appened! Hi was right 'ere, coming into this saloon, when a man rushed hout from the rear there, grabs me bup, flings me over 'is back, hand 'e says, says, 'e 'Hif you 'oller I'll kill you!' Hand then 'e ran with me bup the street till 'e came to the turn bup there, where 'e drops me hin the dust hand kaway 'e goes."

"It was Genteel John!"

So several exclaimed at once.

"Yes, yes; that was the name 'e said."

"And he took ther Britister on his back so's we wouldn't fire at him if we got out in time to draw a bead on him."

"That was it, sure."

"Which way did he go, Englisher?"

"Hup that way, 'ir, at the turn there," indicating.

With a shout a part of the crowd started in pursuit, but it was then too late to think of overtaking the fugitive.

They found the big hat he had worn, and the cloak, and finally they returned with these trophies to the salon.

Here the excitement had scarcely abated any.

The larger portion of the crowd had already re-entered, and everybody was pressing to the front, where the prisoner, his bride, and the others were standing.

Detective Joyce still had the prisoner in charge, but seemed to wish himself well out of the unpleasant situation.

The bride had recovered from her first faint, only to go off into another on realizing the situation.

Queen Ethel and some others were attending her, and much sympathy was expressed.

But, that she deserved little or none of it, we well enough know.

Detective Pearsman had come forward to assist Joyce, in the event of assistance being needed.

"I can't understand this," Joyce remarked.

"Can't understand what?"

"Wly, that Genteel John should have chosen me for this work, unless it was—"

"Was what?"

"To tie my hands so that I could not make any attempt to take him."

"You have guessed it, I believe. He is well enough posted on everything that takes place here, and knows your stand. It was a clever dodge."

"I hope the crowd will get him."

"They will not do it."

"Why?"

"Can you suppose he would venture here without having his plan of retreat well laid out?"

"No; but I hope his plan will miscarry, whatever it is."

"What are you going to do with me?" asked the prisoner. "Will you take the word of such a man against mine?"

"Mr. Joyce holds the proofs," reminded Pearsman. "I suppose your fate will depend upon them. Anything I can do to assist you, Joyce?"

"Yes; take the proofs and examine them."

"Very well, I will do so."

Pearsman took the packet and opened it.

The first paper to meet his eye was one addressed to "The Public."

He read it, first to himself and then aloud to the listening crowd. It was in these words:

"CITIZENS OF DAISY DRIFT:—

"Once again has my vengeance fallen upon Frances Cantrill, the heartless creature who robbed me of my wife. The punishment I have inflicted is not half so great as she deserves. By her evil nature she makes this kind of revenge possible. You will realize that I could have made it worse, but I spare her that. Again she is the wife of a scoundrel, yet one who is worthy of her. My vengeance may fall upon her yet again, if chance offers. She deserves death for her crime, but I seek not her life.

GENTEEL JOHN, THE GENUINE."

"He is heartless!" exclaimed Royal Jim.

"Have you heard the story of his wrongs?" asked Pearsman.

"Not in full, perhaps."

"When you have, you will say he is merciful to make his revenge so light as this."

"Do you know I have a notion to have you arrested?" cried the mayor of the camp, the crowd having now all returned.

"What for?" asked Pearsman.

"For your openly favoring an outlaw, one for whom the law offers a reward—a man with a price upon his head."

"Pray do not give way to your notion, mayor, is all I have to say to you on that head," was the cool rejoinder; and the detective's eyes met those of Millfield in a steady look.

"Well, let's have the proofs against this man," the mayor snarled.

"You shall have them, sir."

The proofs were presented, in the manner in which they were contained in the packet, and nearly an hour was consumed in that way.

Impossible, we find it, to quote them. Let it suffice to say that they were more than ample for the purpose, and Jerry Tomson was left without a single prop to support him in his usurped position.

"What do you say now?" Pearsman demanded, turning upon him when he had finished the reading of the last paper.

"There's no room for me to say anything," was the sullen response. "I have to own up to the corn. But, I'll square accounts with that devil of a detective, if I get the chance."

"Which you will not get," cried Colonel Lyndon.

He had been sent for, it will be remembered, and had responded to the call, Jackson with him.

The rascal's bride, now fully recovered from her faints, sprang forward and faced her disgraced husband like an avenging fury.

"You dog!" she cried. "Why did you so deceive me? Was it not enough that I should have suffered once in this way? Had I not been sufficiently disgraced? I ought to kill you!"

"Why, I did it to oblige you," was the response, with a grin. "You threw yourself at me, were determined to have me whether or not, and so I lent myself to your designs. If you have been bitten, blame yourself for it. Be glad it is no worse than it is."

With a cry of rage the woman sprang forward at him, a knife uplifted to take his life.

It was only by the prompt interference of the detectives that she was balked, and seeing that she could do him no harm then, she drew away.

"But I will have revenge," she muttered. "I will kill not only you, dog that you are! but Genteel John as well! I will show him what it costs to persecute a woman so!"

"You had better not try it," warned Detective Pearsman. "For your own good I say it. If you have wronged him as he says, he is merciful to you withal. You can realize this, if you pause to think for a moment."

"I have no thought save one," was the cry. "That thought is—*revenge!*"

With that, she pushed her way out of the crowd and almost ran from the salon, and was not seen again that night.

"What a man John Heathcote is!" spoke Detective Joyce, in commingled wonderment and admiration.

"Are you ready to agree with me in my estimate of him?" asked Pearsman.

"In what respect?"

"That he is not the outlaw who has been doing these deeds of robbery and murder."

"I am. I am converted now. There are two Genteel Johns in the field, and the crimes you have mentioned were committed by the false John."

"I am glad you see it as I do, at last. He ought to be called the Prince of Detectives, instead of a Detective Outlaw. See the manner in which he has been at work right among those who were most eager to capture him, to get these proofs in the shape he has. It is wonderful!"

"He's a terror, that I admit myself," spoke the prisoner.

"What do you think about it, mayor?" Pearsman asked.

"I'm not ready to make a hero of him, by any means, knowing what I do about him," was the reply.

"No, nor me, either," cried his man Sparkers.

"Yet you can't deny that he has done some good detective work."

"No; but it was all in the way of personal vengeance. It was all done that he might the more bitterly persecute that innocent woman."

"Then you hold her to be innocent?"

"I do, and I pity her."

"Well, I cannot say anything about that, one way or the other. The revenge might have been made more complete, by a little longer delay in the expose, as you cannot but admit."

"Look out for some personal end to be gained by that, too."

"I fail to see where it would come in."

"I'll tell you why it was all done at this time," cried Sparkers. "I don't give that murderer credit for anything."

"Well, why?"

"Because it was his best chance to come here, when the crowd was all in one place and when the woman's shame could be made most keenly felt."

"Well, hold to that view if you will; mine is different. Anyhow, no one will attempt to say this man is innocent of the crime that has been charged against him. You cannot say that."

"No; the case is plain."

"That being so, he is Detective Joyce's prisoner, and I will lend my aid to see that he does not escape, but is delivered over to answer for his crime."

"And here are two more prepared to aid," spoke up Jack Lyndon. "I mean father and I. The time is drawing near when John Heathcote will appear to clear himself of every crime that has been laid to his account."

"Do you mean to call me a perjurer, sir?" thundered Millfield.

"I say I believe John Heathcote to be innocent of every charge that has been laid against him. Make out of it what you please."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE GOAL OF AMBITION GAINED.

THE Mayor of Daisy Drift faced the young man, his eyes gleaming wickedly.

Everybody looked for trouble, but men stepped between them at once, and they could not come together.

By this time all the women had gone from the place save the queen of the gaming-table, who was standing near Royal Jim, an interested witness to all that was taking place.

"Lucky for you that men have come between," cried Millfield, after a moment, "for I was on the point of striking you down for your words. Do you know what you have insinuated, sir? That I am a perjurer—a *perjurer*, sir!"

"And perhaps lucky for you that you were not allowed the opportunity to do it, sir," was the younger man's retort. "You and I have never been friends, and the less so since the evidence you gave at the trial of John Heathcote. The character of your tool there was well proven at that time."

Osmond Millfield was white with rage, and he made an effort to get at Jackson, and they were kept apart.

"Have a care!" he hotly cried. "Have a care! You may have a suit for slander to answer before you are aware of it. I will not tamely submit to this."

The young man waved his hand disdainfully and turned away, and, when Colonel Lyndon had spoken scathingly once more to the prisoner, father and son retired from the place.

"What are you going to do with your prisoner?" demanded the mayor, turning at once to the detectives, to draw attention to something else.

"Take care of him, of course," answered Joyce. "You see, there is no doubt in the matter; Genteel John has done his work too well for that. We'll see that the fellow gets what he deserves."

"But, you will have to prove these proofs."

"A very simple matter to do that."

"Well, I hope it is no fake that will get you into trouble, that is all."

"It was no fake when Genteel John brought about the arrest of Radcliffe Royce, on the occasion of Miss Cantrill's former marriage, was it?"

"No; that I admit. He has not re-arrested that fellow though, I take notice. Why does he not do that? wonderful man that he is."

"Perhaps because he has had other work to do," spoke up Pearsman. "It would not surprise me to see it brought about at any time."

"I suppose not. But, your hero had better take care to himself, for if he is too bold in his operations he may get caught, and then what?"

"Time enough to talk about that when it comes to pass."

The excitement had abated in a measure by this time, and this exchange of remarks was about the last worthy of record.

Joyce, with Pearsman assisting, took the prisoner away, and when they had gone, the Paris Salon opened to the business of the night as though nothing of an exciting nature had taken place.

Mayor Millfield and his man Sparkers had retired to the mayor's office.

"What do you make of all this?" Millfield demanded.

"I make of it that we are in danger, that's what," was the reply.

"Genteel John is the devil."

"He's own cousin to him, at least."

"Where were the police, do you suppose?"

"I give it up. Some of them were in the saloon."

"The very ones who might have taken the fellow, if they had been on their proper posts."

"If he didn't kill them, you mean. I believe he would have shot down any man who got in his way."

"No doubt of it, in my mind. See the way he protected himself from a shot in the rear by shouldering that young Britisher."

"Ha, ha, ha! That fellow was the worst frightened man I ever saw in my life, and that's the fact. He couldn't get hold of an aitch in the right place to save him."

"Well, Genteel John has been here, and he has done another good stroke of work. There is no denying that."

"Not a bit. And, it caused a reaction in his favor, if you noticed."

"I did. Men are beginning to believe as those two detectives do."

Both were thoughtful.

"How are we going to trap him?" Millfield presently asked.

"You ask me too much, now," answered his tool. "If I knew, I would not be a great while about doing it."

"I feel sorry for that woman, hang me if I don't."

"Why don't you marry her?"

"Do you know, Sparkers, that very thought has been in my mind. She is just the sort of companion I want. But, now it's too late."

"Why?"

"Married."

"She can get a divorce easily enough."

"No doubt about that, but she will be wary about making another matrimonial venture, I think."

"I don't quite agree with you."

"No?"

"No. These two blots upon her will make her a drug on the market, so to say, and she will be glad to take any chance that offers."

"Well, confound your impudence, anyhow!"

"Why so?"

"I could have had her for the asking when she first came here, and she would think herself in clover were I to offer now. I want you to know she would not think it any sacrifice on her part."

"Nor would it be."

"Why, I could have taken her from either of those other fellows, without any effort at all. All I would have needed to have done would have been to say—come, and she would have accepted."

"Nothing like having a good opinion of yourself, boss."

"But this is not what interests us just now. What are we going to do with this Genteel John?"

"Nothing."

"But something *must* be done."

"Nothing *can* be done, if we can't lay hands upon him."

"Do you think it possible that he can solve the mystery of the murder of Murdock Kinross?"

"That is the only danger that threatens us. If he does that, and can bring the proof to bear, then we shall be in hot water right away."

"Yes; and so hot it will burn, too."

"Not a bit of doubt about it."

Thoughtful again.

"And he would make it a serious job for us, too," Millfield presently added.

"You can bet your life he would, if he got hold of us," agreed Sparkers. "On my part, I would light out at the first alarm."

"You would, eh?"

"You bet."

"And so confess guilty to the charge? That must not be thought of. You shall stand by me till the last prop is knocked away. Do you understand that? My word goes a long ways, and his proof will have to be of the strongest kind to upset it. Even if he gets the proof, my testimony may back it down and show it up as a scheme to clear himself upon manufactured evidence."

"Do you think so?"

"Of course I do. The chances are not one in a thousand that he can solve the mystery, anyhow."

"It's a doubtful case, I admit."

"You see, it has been solved already, so far as the law is concerned, and the guilty man is Genteel John himself."

"And, should he appear with his proofs, he would be arrested, anyhow."

"Of course. I tell you, Joel, it does not look so bad, smart fellow as he has shown himself to be. I guess we need not take alarm."

"I don't like the looks of the camp, though."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, the change of sentiment toward him in the popular mind."

"That is one bad feature. The fewer friends he had here, the better for us. The more he has, the better his chances."

"Well, mere talk will not make it better or worse, either way. Let's go over to the hotel and get it off our minds by mingling with the crowd there. We will do what we can to keep up the suspicion, anyhow."

So they left the office and crossed to the hotel. The remainder of that night passed without further excitement in the town.

Next morning the mayor investigated into the lack of vigilance on the part of the police, and discharged several of the force.

It was shown that the policemen had become slack in their duties, since nothing had occurred in so long a time, and those who should have been on duty near the Paris Salon were inside to see the wedding.

By the morning stage Detective Joyce went away with his prisoner, and it need not be said that the bride of the evening before did not appear to bid her husband good-by.

Little was seen of her for some days.

She promptly applied for a divorce, through a lawyer at Daisy Drift, and in due time it was granted.

Some weeks had passed, meanwhile, and Jerry Tomson had been delivered over to the authorities at Chicago, where the proof against him had brought his conviction; and now Detective Joyce was again at the village camp.

Nothing more had been seen or heard of Genteel John.

He had disappeared again, utterly, and no one could guess where he was or when he would again put in an appearance.

Things at Daisy Drift were about the same.

Some of the summer boarders had left the hotel, but many still remained, among them Mrs. Rainhard and her son.

Frances Cantril, still holding to her maiden name, was there also, and it was now the talk of the camp that she was about to wed Mayor Millfield.

And there was truth in the report, as was presently shown when the announcement was made and a select few were invited to attend a very quiet wedding at the hotel.

This time the ceremony was passed without interruption, in a very quiet, private way, and Frances Cantril became Mrs. Osmond Millfield. The goal of her ambition had been gained at last; she found herself the wife of a rich and respected man.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

GENTEEL JOHN IN DEADLY PERIL.

SUMMER was on the wane, summer people had nearly all returned to the city, and summer resorts looked deserted.

The season's boarders at the hotel at Daisy Drift had nearly all gone. Only a dozen or so remained, among whom were still Mrs. Rainhard and her son.

E. Garnet Poke was still there, liking it so well, as he declared, that he was loth to leave. He and Johnston Rainhard had struck up quite a friendship, and it did not appear that one would leave before the other.

Johnston's health had so far recovered that, he claimed, he had never felt better in his life, and it was an open question yet whether or not he and his mother would remain there all winter. If not there, they certainly would not go further away than Denver, they declared.

Detectives were still on the lookout for Genteel John.

In spite of the fact that popular opinion had turned in his favor, to a great extent, he was still a convicted murderer, and the law wanted him.

Pearsman and Joyce were there, not so much to take any part against John Heathcote, for they believed him innocent; but for the purpose of running down, if possible, the robber and murderer who had used his name.

Detectives Playfair and Raynold had not been seen again, but others were there in their stead. It was believed that sooner or later their man would appear again at the village camp, when they were determined to have him, dead or alive. That was the way the rewards were offered—dead or alive.

But, to this time, nothing had been seen or heard of him.

One night, at a late hour, there came a rap at the door of the room occupied by Mrs. Rainhard.

There was a little delay, and the door was opened slightly and the woman peered out to see who the caller could be at that hour.

A man was there, and he asked:

"Madam Rainhard?"

"Yes, sir."

"May I come in? I have something important to communicate to you."

"Who are you, sir? What is the nature of your business? You are a stranger to me, I see."

"I bear a message from one who would do you a friendly turn, if you will make it possible for him to do so," was the cautious explanation.

The woman looked at him keenly.

There was something of doubt depicted on her face.

"Well, you may come in, sir," she decided, opening the door wider. "I cannot expect you to state your business standing there in the hall."

The man entered, the door was closed, and the woman placing a chair for him, he took a seat.

"Now," she asked, "who is the person whom you represent?"

"John Heathcote, madam."

The woman gave a start.

"The outlaw!"

"So called, but a man innocent of wrong."

"How know you that? Has he not been proved guilty of murder?"

"Yes; but innocent nevertheless, as you know."

"How could I know?"

"Because, you and you alone are the one guilty of the murder of Murdock Kinross."

The woman recoiled, as though a blow had been struck her.

"And you—you—" she gasped.

"I am John Heathcote, madam; I have traced the crime home to you; I know the whole story."

"But you said you had come here to do me a friendly turn."

"And so I have."

"By arresting me, and putting me in the situation from which you were so fortunate as to escape?"

"Not so, for I am not insensible to the fact that it was to you I owed my escape. All I ask is proof from you that what I shall charge is true, and ample time will be given you to get out of the country before I make the truth known."

"And then men would say you had forged it all."

"Oh, no; I purpose having it done before good witnesses, who will attest the genuineness of it."

"It would do you no good."

"Why?"

"The fact that you allowed me to escape would tell against you."

"Not when I explained my reasons. I would let the officers hunt for you the same as they have hunted for me. It would be doing just as much for you as you did for me at the time when you assisted me to escape."

"I have been sorry that I ever did help you out."

"And so have I, madam. But for that, I would be under no obligations to you, and you would have been arrested ere this."

"Yes, sorry, I say," the woman went on, "after the way you persecuted my daughter, who loved you truly and well."

"I have dealt very leniently with her, Madam Iredell, considering the great wrong she did me. She deserves the same fate as that to which she doomed my wife on that terrible night."

"But, her story is believed—that you caught her up and bore her out of your own free will, whether it was through mistake or not."

"That story was a base lie, and you know it as well as she knows it."

"Well, no matter. And you would offer me the same favor that I did for you when the rope was ready for your neck, eh?"

"Yes. Do what I ask, and I will give you a chance to escape. Refuse, and you force me to do the worst, for my own good name must be cleared, and it shall be cleared. What do you say?"

"I say this, sir: Not for a moment will I listen to your proposition. I am against you, deadly and bitterly against you. For the moment when you brought that first great disgrace upon my daughter I swore that I would have your life for it, and this is my opportunity."

She moved her hand, and a heavy blow fell from behind upon the head of the unsuspecting detective.

He reeled, swaying in the chair, and would have fallen to the floor had not a hand steadied him.

It was the hand of Johnston Rainhard, who had come behind the detective with all the silence of a shadow.

"How was that?" he asked.

"Fine," answered the woman. "We will hasten to secure him, and then wait till he comes to."

"Shall I not finish?"

"No; I must do that myself. I want to taunt him before I take his worthless life."

"Well, do as you please."

A handy small rope was brought from a near closet, and while the woman held the almost senseless detective up in the chair, the man bound his arms.

That done, the rope was passed around the chair, and they waited for him to recover.

"We have got him at last," remarked the woman.

"Yes," agreed the man; "and now to settle with him for the past."

Gradually the detective recovered from the blow, and presently had command of himself once more.

He realized the fix he was in.

"Why did you not finish the work so well begun?" he asked.

"Because that would not have been revenge sweet enough," answered the woman. "I want to taunt you."

"Well, you have me helpless. I was sure you were alone."

"And so I was, till my son came to me through the hole he made a long time ago through that closet."

"Ha! that was a clever trick."

"Yes; so clever that you have fallen into our trap," spoke the man.

"We have waited patiently for a long time," added the woman. "I was sure you would come again, for I had made up my mind it was you who paid me the visit that night, personating my son."

"Yes, it was I. You have not acknowledged receipt of the money I sent back to you; the money I obtained while playing to carry out my disguise perfectly."

"I received it—"

"Yes, I know you did; I only speak of it to show you that I do know it, and that I had no need of your money, much less any desire to take or keep it. It was only a part of my trick."

"You did not return the papers, however."

"No; they were far too valuable to me. By them I traced out the secret of the mystery—"

"Say no more about that," approaching him menacingly with a knife. "By your taking those papers I guessed who you were. You, too, took the papers from Mr. Pathfinder, the papers that brought about his conviction."

"From Jerry Tomson, you mean; yes."

"You have played well, but you have been overreached at last. Fool you were that you did not take the chance I offered you and make good your escape."

"With the crime upon me! Not so. My purpose was to solve that mystery and clear myself of the charge. And, I have done it. I suppose you will hand me over to the officers and claim the rewards that are offered for me."

"That was my determination, but, curse you, you have made that impossible, by what you know."

"Then what will you do?"

"Kill you, here, this hour!"

The words were fairly hissed in his face, and the threatening knife was brandished before his eyes.

"That will be a bad thing for you to do, for the proof will be all against you, and you cannot hope to escape the penalty."

"There you mistake. We have it all planned. Curse you! we have waited for this very time, well knowing that sooner or later you would fall into our trap."

"And you take advantage of me, when I came as a friend with only friendly intent. Very well, make sure of me, for if you do not I swear that you shall both be brought to what you richly deserve."

"Never fear but that I will make sure work of it," the woman gloated. "If you have anything more to say, say it quick, for I am going to strike."

"There is one question I would ask."

"Ask it."

"Did you set fire to that hotel?"

"Yes; as I now tell you without fear."

"As I suspected. Had I known that sooner, I would not have come here to show you mercy. If I escape you now, no mercy need you expect."

"You shall not escape; you die—now!"

The steel-nerved detective made no answer, but tugged violently at his bonds, making the chair creak terribly in his efforts. He did not dare call for help, for that would only bring enemies upon him; yet, evidently, that was what was feared, for the woman rushed suddenly upon him, lifted the knife, and struck the deadly blow.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A CLEVER GUESS CREATES ALARM.

GENTEEL JOHN had taken a risk, and one that might have cost him his life.

It has now been shown that Mrs. Rainhard, of Chicago, and Madam Iredell, the mother of Frances Cantril, were one and the same.

And, too, it has been shown that Genteel John accused her of the murder of Murdock Kinross. Patiently had he worked, and at last the secret of the mystery was all plain to him.

Still, he had not forgotten that this woman had once risked her life to save his, and he was not insensible of the obligation he owed her. He would do the same favor for her, if he could; that was, if she would give him that proof positive that would clear him.

So, as said, he had taken a risk, and that risk had proved against him.

He had walked into a trap that had been laid for him, and was now in the power of two of his worst enemies.

The woman, as we have seen, had repented of ever having served him at all, and was now hungry to take the life she had once saved. That she did not succeed was no fault of hers.

The blow she struck had been a savage one indeed, and it would surely have been fatal had it struck where she had intended it should.

The prisoner, however, had been tugging and straining at his bonds, and just when he saw the blow coming he forced his chair back and thus escaped the keen blade which otherwise must have cut his heart in twain.

As it was, what might have proved his death, proved instead his salvation, as if the hand of Providence were in it.

The blade struck not his body, but the cords

which bound him to the chair, and they were severed instantly and he was free—free to defend himself against his foes.

As soon as he realized what had happened, and he realized it instantly, the sport sprung to his feet, at the same time grasping a revolver by its barrel, and before the man he had to oppose could know what was coming a blow from the revolver butt had laid him out on the floor.

The next moment the now triumphant detective sprung upon the woman assassin, and his hand quickly covered her mouth to prevent any outcry.

"You would have killed me!" he hoarsely whispered. "Would have killed me, and I here for the purpose of offering you a chance for your life—murderess that you are! No mercy will I show you now."

The woman struggled, but she was as nothing in the grasp of the athlete.

In a few moments she was bound and gagged effectually, and then the same was done with the insensible man who had been playing the role of son to her.

"There," the detective said, "the tables are turned. Success is mine, and now I shall soon be able to clear myself of the terrible charges that were made against me, and which came near bringing me to the gallows."

The woman's eyes flashed, and it was plain that she would have retorted hotly had she been able to speak.

"I would have shown you mercy," Heathcote added, "for you did a good turn for me, but now you have closed that door against yourself. The gallows awaits you. And as for you," turning upon the man, who was just recovering consciousness, "you shall be returned to the prison from which this woman helped you to escape, Radcliffe Joyce."

The detective was in a disguise, and his hat had not been dislodged from his head. It was that which had lessened the severity of the blow he had received, which otherwise might have been serious enough, if not indeed fatal.

Arranging what had been disordered about himself and the room, he made doubly sure that his prisoners were well secured, and prepared to leave them there for the present.

When ready to go, he said:

"Now, make yourselves as comfortable as you can till my return. I shall not be long gone. You cannot escape; I will take the precaution to lock the door and take the key with me."

He opened the door, looked cautiously out, and finding the way clear, went out and secured the door after him.

On the following morning there was a sensation at the hotel.

Mrs. Rainhard and her son Johnston had mysteriously disappeared, leaving all their effects in their rooms.

The landlord was somewhat interested, as their board had run in arrears, although that, previously, had given him no concern, for he had found them good pay.

The rooms were in perfect order, the beds had not been slept in, and there was nothing to explain the mystery of their sudden disappearance. Their absence had been noted at a late hour in the morning.

Inquiry brought little if any light upon the question.

The young Englishman, whose room was near theirs, said he had heard voices in Mrs. Rainhard's room at a late hour.

Other persons were questioned, especially the policemen who had been on duty near the hotel, but nothing was to be learned about the absent guests. It did not appear how they could have left the place without being seen by somebody.

Finally, the landlord made the discovery of the hole which had been made from one room to the other through the closet, and this aroused suspicions of more than usual import. Why had that hole been made? Were these persons what they had pretended to be? Could it be that Johnston Rainhard had been Genteel John, the outlaw?

Upon this discovery being made known, the detectives took active interest in the matter and earnest and diligent search was begun.

The result was fruitless, however. The missing ones were not to be found, nor any trace of them.

There was certainly much mystery here.

Who and what had the couple really been? Why had they gone away so unexpectedly and so mysteriously? How had they departed so secretly that no one had seen them go? And where had they gone to?

Questions none could answer.

The detectives had now made a thorough search of the rooms and the effects of the missing ones, but nothing was found to throw any light upon the mystery.

Inquiry was made at all the neighboring camps and towns, and along all the roads leading from Daisy Drift, but not a word of information was to be gleaned and the mystery was a mystery indeed—a sort of nine-days' wonder as it were.

Some days passed.

"It beats the deuce," growled Mayor Millfield, speaking to his man Sparkers.

"More than that," the tool declared. "It beats the biggest throw in the box. The detectives have given it up."

"I know they have. They are stumped."

"Can it be possible that the man was Genteel John, after all?"

"You know better, Joel. We decided that question long ago. The two were not of the same size and shape."

"I know that, but from what we know of Genteel John's ability as a detective, I am ready to believe he could appear in any shape, almost."

"But, he could not do the impossible. No; whoever else the man was, he was not John Heathcote, positively."

"And you can't offer any solution to the mystery, eh?"

"Not the slightest, as I have told you twenty times over. It gets ahead of me entirely."

"Have you noticed one thing, boss?"

"What's that?"

"I'll tell you, though it may not amount to anything, but I took notice of it to-day, and the thought struck me. Have you noticed the interest your wife seems to take in the affair?"

Millfield scowled, as though his man was venturing too far.

"I know women are naturally curious," Sparkers added, "but your wife seems to be a little more than curious. It has struck me that maybe this Mrs. Rainhard was her mother, Madam Iredell. What do you think about that?"

"Thunder!" ejaculated the mayor. "Why did I not think of that long ago? That is the person the woman always reminded me of, but I could never place her right. That hits the nail on the head, Joel."

"And your wife never told you?"

"No; but, as you say, that explains her interest in the affair. It is certain that she had no knowledge of the intended departure."

"Funny your wife could not trust you enough to take you into her confidence, for you knew who and what her mother was. There has been a deep game going on here, boss, as sure as you live."

"I see it, now. But, I'll have the rest of it, now that you have put me on the right track. I'll go and see my wife at once."

"And you want to find out who that man was, while you are about it?"

"Never fear but I'll do it."

Millfield left the office in haste, and Sparkers sat down to await his return.

At the end of half an hour he was back again, and his face wore a dark and troubled expression.

"Well, was I right?" Sparkers demanded.

"Yes, you were, and there is the dickens to pay."

"What is that?"

"I suspect that Genteel John has been at the bottom of it all."

"What makes you think that?"

"Guess who the man was who was with Madam Iredell."

"Give it up."

"It was Radcliffe Royce."

"The escaped convict!"

"Exactly. And it looks as though John Heathcote has nabbed him again. Look out for another sensation."

"But what in creation was he doing here with your respected mamma-in-law? What was the meaning of that hole through the wall from one room to the other?"

"That was what puzzled me, but I have got it all now. Madam Iredell hated Genteel John, after the dastardly trick he served my wife, and knowing that Royce would be his bitterest foe, contrived to get him out of prison to help her in hunting John down for revenge."

"Mystery—thicker, faster, and more of it. Is it possible that Royce is the man who killed Kinross?"

"Possibly; my wife does not know. Madam Iredell seemed to have a hold upon him of some sort."

"Then, in the name of wonders, who and what is Genteel John? How has he managed to enter this town and get away again, with two prisoners, without being seen?"

"There is only one way that I can explain it."

"And how is that?"

"He has been gaining friends and sympathizers here, and maybe they have helped him."

"Ten to one you are right, boss. And, if Royce did kill Kinross, and Genteel John has got the proof of it, where are we? Isn't it about time we shook the dust of this place off our boots?"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS.

THE time when the conversation was taking place between the mayor and Sparkers was about the close of the day, and the evening stage was momentarily expected to arrive.

Even while Sparkers was speaking the rumble of the stage was heard, and without waiting to make any response then, the mayor dismissed the subject for the moment and went out.

His man followed him.

The stage had just drawn up at the hotel, and as the driver flung down the lines, he cried:

"Wull, citizens, I fetch ye news this hyer time, you bet."

"News? What is it?"

"The outlaw, Genteel John, has been ketch-ed."

"Hear that!" exclaimed Millfield, turning to his man. "We are interested in this."

He made haste to cross the street.

"What's that you say, driver?" he demanded. "Genteel John arrested?"

"That's what I said. I heard about et jest as I was pullin' out. He was arrested to-day at Denver."

"Are you sure the report is true? Sure there is no mistake about it?"

"Wull, I can't swear to et, but I got et straight enough. Somethin' was said about a woman an' a man bringin' him to the jail and handin' him over."

That was enough. It was not needed that further particulars be given, for the mayor and his man, and the detectives, understood it; the latter not quite so fully as the mayor, perhaps.

"Good!" cried Millfield. "Boys, does not this account for the missing couple from the hotel here?"

The crowd understood, then, and a cheer went up.

Millfield went back to his office, followed by Sparkers, and as soon as they had closed the door they shook hands.

"How is that for high?" the mayor demanded.

"That's bully!" was the response. "Now a fellow can draw a full breath once more."

"And he will hang this time, sure enough. They have nipped him, sure. We were looking at the matter from the wrong side, it seems."

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes, we thought Genteel John had gobbled them, when it was right the other way. Oh, this is too good, this is! Now we can attend the Englisher's blow-out to-night without any fear of Heathcote."

The "blow-out" referred to was to be an event of no mean importance, locally.

E. Garnet Poke, the young Englishman, had announced his departure from Daisy Drift, and on this night was to give a farewell entertainment to his friends in the Paris Salon.

He had become quite popular, in a way, and his invitations had gone forth the day before to a ready and appreciative circle.

He had bought the privilege of the salon for the occasion, and it was expected that he would give an entertainment in style worthy a prince. All the elite of the camp, men and women, had accepted.

This was even so of Colonel and Mrs. Lyndon, and their son, though their acceptance was the cause of some comment, for they were in mourning. The young Englishman had become quite intimate with the family, however, and as the affair was to be a quiet one, there was some excuse for them.

Besides, the Paris Salon had grown in favor. Its character was by this time well-established, and it was known as a respectable place, as such resorts go. As it was the largest hall in the village, it had been used several times since its opening for similar purposes.

The news of the arrest of the escaped murderer and dreaded outlaw had created a good deal of excitement, and even when the time for the reception came it hardly abated any.

At the time appointed, Mr. Poke was on hand to receive his friends.

The bar had been closed for the occasion, as had also the games, and the room was like a salon in fact.

Within an hour after the opening, or rather, the time appointed for the reception, all the guests were there, and in truth nearly the whole population of the camp as well.

The rough element was represented, of course, but the place had long since shown its teeth against such fellows as "Giant Gore," and it was easy to maintain order. They were orderly now, and Mr. Poke did not slight them in his recognition of his many friends.

Finally some one, nobody could say just who had done it, called for the young Englishman to address the assembly.

That request was immediately seconded in various parts of the room, and presently there was a general clamor for a speech. Nothing short of that would satisfy.

At length Mr. Poke yielded, and mounting a table—the strong faro table on the dais at the end of the hall—he waved the crowd to silence, and when the hum of voices died away, said:

"Ladies and Gentlemen: You invite me to address you, and I will begin by saying that is what I most desire to do at this time. I have something of vital importance to say to you, one and all. It was for this very purpose, and for it only, that you were invited here this evening."

Needless to say the crowd was silent enough now.

"The time for my unmasking is at hand," the speaker went on, his words filling the greater part of his hearers with amazement. "I must

tell you that I am not what I appear; that I am not what I have pretended to be all these weeks; but, that I am John Heathcote, the man upon whose head a price has been set—for a crime of which I am not guilty."

While he spoke he had removed his disguise, and there was the face of John Heathcote, unmistakably recognized by all who had known him.

The excitement that prevailed then can hardly be described. Those who had been true to the wronged man cheered, others uttered exclamations of amazement, and others still recoiled with faces blanched.

Among the latter were Mr. and Mrs. Osmond Millfield and Joel Sparkers.

Others, the detectives who had not been let into the secret, pressed forward as though to make sure of their man.

"Do not get excited, I beg," the outlawed detective said, calmly. "Those who are my foes cannot harm me, and those who are my friends need have no alarm on my account. Those who would arrest me will have no occasion to do so now, for I have at last solved the mystery of the murder of Murdock Kinross, and the murderer is my prisoner. I stand before you an innocent man, citizens of Daisy Drift."

Joel Sparkers had turned away, and was worming his way toward the rear door.

His purpose was to seek personal safety, but when he opened the door there was a man to meet him, and a pair of handcuffs were snapped upon his wrists.

"Let me go, let me go!" he pleaded, calling aloud in the agony of his fears. "I will own up to it, if you will only let me go! It was a lie, what we told; but the boss put me up to it!"

At the same time, Millfield and his wife were moving toward the front doors, but they were stopped and Millfield too was handcuffed, while his wife sunk down upon a chair overcome with this last blow from the man she had wronged. Little pity she deserved.

"You will recognize that it is my inning, this time," the cool detective said, when these arrests had been accomplished. "You see the fate of the perjurers who would have sworn away my life. They shall suffer the full penalty for their crime. And now, by your leave, I will tell my story in full."

Quietly, men had moved to positions around the table upon which the outlawed detective stood, and they now faced the multitude with weapons drawn, ready to defend him. And among them were Detective Pearsman, Detective Joyce, Colonel Lyndon, Jackson, Royal Jim and also Queen Ethel and others. At other places about the room, too, armed men were seen stationed.

"My story is well known to you, to the time of my escape from jail. That escape was accomplished by a woman, then unknown to me, and she it was who had killed my step-father. Unwilling to see me die for her crime was her reason partly for aiding me to escape, and I felt grateful to her accordingly. But, a later attempt upon my life, after I had discovered her secret, when I would have given her a chance, turned me bitterly against her, and the law must take its course with her."

"And that woman, people of Daisy Drift, was the one who has been known to you here as Madam Iredell, but later as Mrs. Rainhard of Chicago."

The hum of excited comment drowned his voice for some moments.

"Yes, she it was," the wronged man presently went on. "And the man with her, who passed for her son, was no other than Radcliffe Royce, or Robert Woonstead, as he was once known to you here, and whom I sent to prison for the bank robbery at Denver. I have them both prisoners, and the proof I have brought to bear against the murderers is not to be doubted. But, I anticipate. When I first came here I was known among you as Fenton Doyle, a sport. After the first move I made I had to adopt a new disguise, and the one in which you have known me best was this which I have just removed. It was a good one. I bought the outfit, trunk and all, of an Englishman who was stranded at Denver, and whose name was Edgar G. Prentiss. All I needed in adopting a name was to select one to fit the initials on the trunk, and I would be reasonably safe. How the trick worked, you have seen."

Cheers were given. The crowd was on his side now, almost to a man.

"You will recognize the difficulty under which I labored," Genteel John went on. "I had to keep out of the hands of sharp detectives, and at the same time had to be among them, and had to take the aggressive all the time in order to push forward my own plans. It was no easy task, but I have at last brought it to a successful ending. And, not only have I solved the mystery of the murder, but I have solved also the secret of the false Genteel John, the robber, murderer, and what not, who operated under my name in order that the blame for his misdeeds might fall upon me. And there he stands, Osmond Millfield, as vile and black-hearted a rascal as ever lived. Oh, do not deny it; I have the proofs, you wretch!"

The crowd could hardly contain itself longer.

The excitement was at highest pitch, and the cheering was wild.

"Yes, he it was; most of the band have been arrested and some of them have made clean confessions of the whole matter. At the time of their mysterious disappearance at the bank of the river, they escaped by getting upon a huge raft that had been made for the purpose, and from which they took leave one by one miles down the river. It was a clever scheme, but it has been ferreted out at last and they shall pay for it all. At the time of the robbery of the Express Office here, the watchman no doubt saw and recognized Millfield as the robber, and in order to still his tongue the rascal had to kill him then and there. But, I wander about in my recital, as I see. I am no lawyer, however, so allowance must be made. I will return to the murder of Kinross and show the woman's motive."

He paused a moment for breath, but the rougher portion of the audience urged him to proceed with his narrative. All were eager to hear the rest of the particulars.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CONCLUSION.

"I MUST beg your indulgence and take a new start," Genteel John said, when he spoke again. "Perhaps by so doing I shall be the better able to keep my narrative in hand and not let it run away with me, as I have been doing. I will make plain some of the obscure points in the string of events of that terrible night of the fire in the hotel in Denver."

"In the first place, it will be remembered that here Osmond Millfield was my rival for the hand of Nydia Lyndon—poor Nydia! while Frances Cantril was her foe on account of love for me,—such love as such a creature can feel. Both had vowed vengeance against us, and when, upon our arrival at Denver on our way here, on that fatal occasion, we found them at the hotel, we were anything but easy in mind. But, you have read most of this in the press."

"That night Millfield, with his tool Sparkers, hatched a scheme to decoy me out from the hotel while they stole my bride and made off with her. A part of their scheme was the decoy message that was sent to me purporting to be from Jackson Lyndon, and which, unthinkingly, I set out so promptly to answer. But, the event of the murder upset that plan, yet at the same time gave them one which was even more to their evil liking. Just as Kinross fell dying at the foot of the stairs, and just as I stopped with my foot almost against him, Millfield opened the front door and he and Sparkers entered."

"Then it was the hell-born suggestion came to him and he accused me of the crime, saying he had seen me strike the blow. And, as you know, everything was black against me. I had quarreled with the murdered man; I was in haste to go out; I told them the reason for my haste, but afterward when that telegram could not be produced, nor any trace of it be found, it was set down as a deliberate lie; and, all taken together, I was a doomed man. But I shall stand clear at last, and right shall triumph over wrong."

"The murder? You see I am not holding to the events in order. Well, Madam Iredell had been imposed upon by Murdock Kinross, and greatly wronged by him. On the strength of his lying promises to her he had got control of a considerable fortune, and at last cast her off. Finding there was nothing to be gained, she resolved to take his life, and laid her plans to do it. She knew of him coming to Denver, and took up quarters at the hotel to be ready for him. On that fatal night she lured him to a dimly-lighted lower room at the end of the hall on the first floor, and there struck him the deadly blow. She retreated at once, and believing him to be still in the room, set fire to the house to hide her crime. All of this I am prepared to prove, by proofs and confessions together."

"You now have the main features of the matter. It would be impossible, almost, for me to go into the details of my work on the case; how I have followed the clues from point to point, steadily, earnestly, with the one thought of working for right and revenge ever in mind to urge me on. How I have been helped by those who believed in my innocence in spite of appearances. How I have been befriended and helped to escape at times when the bounds of the law almost had their hands upon me. How Providence itself has seemed to aid me at times when all looked dark and I was almost in despair. Nor must I forget, now, to introduce Mr. Southway and his peerless wife, who so generously offered their services to me, for the purpose of decoying, if possible, the false Genteel John into a trap that they might capture him and so take at least that burden from my shoulders. Let me introduce them now."

And he did so, mentioning them by their true names—names that had become familiar in detective annals throughout the land.

"All the minor points you will readily understand," he resumed. "When I escaped from you here on the night of Jerry Tomson's arrest, it was an easy matter for me to throw off my disguise and return to you as the Englishman,

with the story of having been roughly handled by Genteel John. On the first occasion, too, when I seemed to be proof against bullets, I had taken the precaution to put on a shirt of mail, expecting that I should be fired upon. It saved my life. What more can I say? If there are detectives here who feel inclined to arrest me now, let me say to them that it will not be worth their while to do so; the reward would not be paid, for I am going to Denver anyhow to give myself up. I am sure of my ground, and my release is certain. My prisoners will now be brought in, in the charge of detectives from Denver, together with my lawyer, who is here."

A signal was given, and the prisoners were brought in, under guard of two detectives.

Their disguises had been removed, and they stood forth confessed, shame-faced enough. They did not deny the charge made against them.

"But, what of the story that Genteel John had been arrested at Denver?" asked the driver of the stage, he having been the one to bring that report to the camp, as we have shown.

"That, sir," spoke up Heathcote's lawyer, "was a trick to disarm all suspicion here, and to lead the rascals to feel secure for the time being, so that this disclosure might fall upon them with all the greater force. The report was false, of course."

Many other trifling points, which it were idle to set forth, were explained away, and Genteel John was the hero of the hour.

Needless to say, he was not arrested.

The reception which he had set out to give as the young Englishman, was turned into a grand ovation for him by the people of the camp, who, to a man, welcomed him in a hearty way, expressing their shame at having for a moment doubted him.

All the prisoners were well guarded during the night, and on the following morning the party set off for Denver.

John Heathcote was promptly discharged, when his proofs were presented, and the guilty one, and those who had sworn falsely against him, were held to answer for their crimes.

The newspapers, which before had been so ready to condemn, were now effusive in their praise of the man who, fighting against such terrible odds, had yet cleared himself and brought the crime home to the guilty party; and those who had remained true to him from the beginning were duly honored.

Eventually, Osmond Millfield, Joel Sparkers, and the others of the outlaw band paid the full penalty for their evil deeds. Madam Iredell, however, escaped, death coming to her relief before the fatal day fixed for her execution. It was believed that poison had been conveyed to her in some manner by her daughter. As for her, she disappeared and was never seen again.

In conclusion, would that we might say John Heathcote's bride had in some manner escaped the flames on that terrible night of fire, but impossible. Her premonition of death had been a warning only too true. She perished; and so the life of her sorrowing husband was wholly changed. He was a detective by destiny. He could not, he declared, settle down to any quiet business life, but must have excitement or die. So, with a liking for the calling into which he had been forced, he entered the lists as a scourge against crime and criminals, and ere long the name of "Genteel John" had become a terror to evil-doers of every stripe.

THE END.

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